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CPYRGHT Fund, What CIA Fund?

The three McNamara proteges who pleaded innocent to embezzling \$57,000 from Defense Department funds had the best defense in the world: Hardly anyone knew about the existence of the funds they are charged with stealing. Secretary McNamara made no fuss about it; he asked them to resign secretly. The General Accounting Office couldn't get near the books, "for reasons of national security." Robert Kennedy, then Attorney General, wouldn't prosecute because President Johnson didn't want a scandal during the election campaign. Only columnists Allen and Scott got through these defenses and broke the story on September 4.

The three officials, who pleaded innocent in Alexandria last Tuesday, are all top echelon officials. J. Robert Loftis is administrative assistant to Secretary McNamara. John A. Wylie was head of the Budget and Finance Branch of the Defense Department. William H. Godel was deputy director of the Advanced Research Projects Agency. Loftis is accused of padding his expense accounts, but the others are said to have embezzled from a fund reserved for "confidential enterprises or projects."

Now the moral of this tale is not that in a big government, where lots of money is spent, there are bound to be a few dishonest officials. To be sure, it will always be so. The really sobering moral is that vast amounts of power, unchecked by Constitution

or democratic process, tend to corrupt absolutely. The \$57,000 is petty cash. Defense Department officials have testified that hundreds of millions of dollars in the Defense Department every year go for purposes known only to a handful of officials.

Some of the money undoubtedly goes for secret weapons development and research projects. But much of the hidden funds go to the Central Intelligence Agency for its action missions overseas, and its illegal surveillance activities in the U. S. It would be pleasant to report that these funds always are used for the best interests of the U. S., but the dissension and fear sowed in Cambodia, and Thailand and elsewhere suggest otherwise. Indeed, Allen and Scott have also charged that other money was taken from the same secret slush fund to pay off certain persons in South Viet Nam for their role in the ouster-assassination of President Diem.

Although a recent book suggested that the CIA was a secret government acting contrary to the wishes of elected officials, it seems rather that the CIA is an undercover action arm to do the bidding of officials who want to escape the blame. How handy to be able to disavow mistakes, or to dissimulate one's real aims! Who can check? Were it not for occasional scandals, the very existence of these funds would not come to light. We must assume that whoever has the funds to spend also calls the tune.