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CPYRGHT

EDUCATION

Repairing an Image

For the National Student Association, this is the time for introspection. While the issues at past conventions have centered on the war, civil rights and drugs, the 1,200 delegates from 334 colleges meeting at the University of Maryland last week seemed most concerned about the future of the NSA itself.

The NSA's image as an independent, loosely knit organization devoted to students' interests was hurt last winter when Ramparts magazine disclosed that the Central Intelligence Agency had bank-rolled and influenced the association for more than a decade. NSA president W. Eugene Groves even admitted as the two-week convention opened that the association had been no less than "an intelligence and operations wing for the CIA." But the I Spy period may be over. The NSA says it has cut its ties to the intelligence agency, and has even taken over the mortgage payments on its national headquarters in Washington (a burden formerly carried by the CIA).

Ironically, the CIA disclosures may have breathed life into the NSA. Thirty colleges and universities have joined since the Ramparts article appeared, while only one—Brandeis—dropped out. "Sure, there's good and bad in the NSA," says Chuck Hicks, president of Syracuse's university union, a newcomer to the association. "But we feel it has a lot to offer in terms of student services."

Same Game: The major challenge to NSA programs last week came from about twenty members of the aggressive Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) who set up their own counterconvention nearby on the Maryland campus. Citing continuing State Department payments to the NSA, the SDS charged that student association officers still "play the same games of international politics" as in the CIA days.

Most NSA delegates paid the SDS scant attention, happily shifting their attendance from all-night legislative sessions to performances by the Fugs and Timothy Leary, who came on with flowers and beads. Leary, who exhorted the students to "drop out of American society," was disappointed with the reception they gave him. He conceded that he usually felt "more rapport" with an audience.