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## Role of FBI Is a Basic Question

A studied effort is being made to picture J. Edgar Hoover as overtaken by the caprices of age because of his recent outspoken remarks on various subjects that have been troubling him for a long time.

Hoover is a vigorous 70, in full possession of his faculties with no intention of resigning but quite aware that he cannot serve forever as director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

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He must have spoken as he did to a group of women reporters because he had a central message relating to the FBI as it will be when he is no longer there. Perhaps Hoover did not have this consciously in mind. But there was a single thread running through his discussion which revealed the nature of his concern.

This concern is that the FBI may become in the future when he is no longer there a kind of national police force carrying out policies originating in the Department of Justice and the White House.

Hoover's reaction to the Warren Commission criticism brings forth the point that if the Warren recommendations were carried out the FBI and the Secret Service would have to adopt the type of security procedures identified with the authoritarian central police and security forces of many foreign countries.

Whatever else Hoover has done in the FBI, this is

exactly what he has avoided. Even when concern ran highest over Communist infiltration of the government and public institutions, there was no case to be made that Hoover was conducting a vin-



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dictive Red hunt and transgressing the rights of individuals.

The issue on civil rights really centers on the point of whether or not the FBI shall be the instrument of reform. Hoover's position is that Congress has given him specific, clear and limited responsibility for enforcement of a long series of acts relating to civil rights. This responsibility does not include such preventive acts as guarding civil rights workers who go into the South to achieve reforms, as Hoover sees it. His role, he believes, is solely the investigation of criminal acts.

The real issue is whether or not the FBI shall become an activist agency for reform, for the preven-

tion of crime, and for the enforcement of preventive internal security. If it does, its aims would change from one administration to the next. Its safest course, and the safest course for the country, is to hew exactly to the line of the law.

Many people seem to think that the FBI director is a presidential appointee who holds office at the pleasure of the President. He is not; he is appointed by the attorney general without confirmation by the Senate.

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In view of the changing attitudes in this country, and the risk that the FBI may some day be made an activist agency for carrying out political policies, this is a good time to study the various proposals for changing the method of selection of the FBI head.

Hoover is not planning to resign now or in the near future. By the time he does resign a law could be passed that his successor would be selected by the President for a 15-year term, subject to confirmation by the Senate. The debate on this bill and the hearings on Hoover's successor could define a consensus on what the post-Hoover FBI should be.

The chances are good that this consensus would favor the FBI as it is, a hard-hitting, objective agency for the investigation of criminal acts as defined by law.