

The Hoover Incident— LBJ Reacts

By DAVID KRASLOW

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 20. —

President Johnson reportedly is highly disturbed by FBI director J. Edgar Hoover's candid criticism of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Supreme Court and the Warren Commission.

Officially, the White House maintained silence. But informed sources said the President reacted sharply when he learned of Mr. Hoover's statements, made Wednesday at a press conference with women reporters.

White House Press Secretary George B. Reedy even refused to comment when asked whether the President agreed with Mr. Hoover's characterization of Dr. King, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and prominent Negro leader, as "the most notorious liar in the country."

NO COMMENT

"I wouldn't try to characterize the President's position one way or the other," Mr. Reed said. "I have no comment."

Mr. Reed also said that as far as he knew the President had not talked to Mr. Hoover in the last 24 hours.

Mr. Hoover's candid observations at the unusual on-the-record session with 18 women reporters would be an embarrassment to the President in any case.

But what made the embarrassment even more acute was that publication of Mr. Hoover's remarks, in which he criticized Dr. King, coincided with a previously scheduled meeting on civil rights matters yesterday morning between the President and a group of Negro leaders.

There was some speculation that Mr. Hoover's behavior was that of a man who was about to retire and wanted to get some things off his chest.

But an FBI spokesman said that Mr. Hoover, who will be 70 on Jan. 1, has no intention of retiring, and there was no indication that the President was thinking of asking for Mr. Hoover's resignation.

The Negro leaders braced the President at the White House meeting about Mr. Hoover's criticism of Dr. King. They said they support Dr. King "in his conviction that the FBI has not provided the protection Negroes should receive from the central government."

Roy Wilkins, executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, told reporters:

"We expressed our disagreement with Mr. Hoover's characterization of Dr. King."

Asked how Mr. Johnson reacted, Mr. Wilkins said:

"The President simply listened to us. He did not give any answer or comment."

Another sharp reaction came from Mississippi civil rights leader Charles Evers, brother of assassinated NAACP leader Medgar Evers.

Mr. Evers said in Jackson yesterday he telegraphed Mr. Hoover, asking him to "step down and let a more capable person take over."

The telegram said Mississippi Negroes "can testify that prior to the Kennedy Administration Negroes of Mississippi and Alabama hardly knew there was an FBI."

"Negro homes were bombed, churches burned, we were beaten and murdered," it said. "As of today, there have been very few arrests by the FBI and no convictions at all."

Dr. King was among the Negro leaders invited to the White House meeting, but he remained in Bimini, a Bahamian island near Florida, where he was vacationing and preparing his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize.

In a wire to Mr. Hoover, Dr. King said:

"I have sincerely questioned the effectiveness of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in racial incidents particularly where bombings and brutalities against Negroes are at issue.

"But I have never attributed this merely to the presence of Southerners in the FBI. This is a part of the broader question of Federal involvement in the protection of Negroes in the South and the seeming inability to gain convictions in even the most heinous crimes perpetrated against civil rights workers."

An FBI source said Mr. Hoover "has wanted to say these things for a long time. And he just decided to say them."

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