

FBI Was Unfairly Criticized; Isn't a National Police Force

By JOHN CHAMBERLAIN



President Johnson has tried to damp down the controversy between Dr. Martin Luther King, Negro Nobel Prize-winner and President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI. In the course of doing it he tossed a measured compliment in Mr. Hoover's direction, saying that in "the study and the investigation in this field of civil rights he has been diligent and rather effective." "I would hope," the President continued, "that in the months ahead we would have further evidence of his—the outstanding capacity of his people—and that this would not degenerate into a . . . battle of personalities."

Put into non-diplomatic language, this means that the President is telling Dr. Martin Luther King to stop criticizing the FBI for sins that it has not committed. At the same time the President is expressing a hope that J. Edgar Hoover will be careful in the future about blowing off steam. This is fair enough all around.

Right to Be Angry

The fact, however, is that J. Edgar Hoover did have good reason for getting hot under the collar. When Dr. Martin Luther King said that not a single ar-

rest had been made in Albany, Georgia, during a period in which the Negroes were complaining of brutalities, he inferentially pointed an insinuating finger at the FBI. But, as Mr. Hoover has had to explain over and over again, his organization is purely an investigative one.

The FBI agents in the Albany area (four out of five of whom were, incidentally, northerners) went into the numerous allegations of civil rights violations and reported to the Department of Justice. The agents also made further investigations when the Department called for them. The Attorney General, who happened at the time to be Bobby Kennedy, did not see fit to prosecute for civil rights infringement in any of the Albany incidents arising from local police arrests of demonstrators who had laid themselves down in the streets to block traffic. But the Department did bring a case against the Deputy Marshal of Sasser, Georgia, which is twenty miles from Albany, on complaints made by FBI investigators that the Deputy had fired his gun in the direction of the tires of voter registration workers.

Have Been Zealous

Through no fault of the FBI the Deputy was acquitted by a U.S. District Court Petit Jury. The point to be made here is that the FBI has been zealous in gathering evidence in Georgia, and that the Department of Justice for which it works is willing

to prosecute, if it thinks it has a case that will stand up in court.

Dr. King, again inferentially pointing an insinuating finger at the FBI, made the acid observation that not a single arrest had been made in connection with the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, or the three murdered civil rights workers in Mississippi. But the FBI has identified a small group of Ku Klux Klansmen which it thinks was responsible for bombing the church. It has not, however, been able to obtain confessions that would insure a successful prosecution of the case. As for the Mississippi murders, it was the FBI that located the bodies of the dead men in an earthen dam. It also believes that it has developed information that will lead to prosecution of those responsible for the murders.

Work With Locals

Dr. King is understandably vexed because the wheels of justice grind slowly. He doesn't like it that FBI agents work with local officers on criminal cases. This, he has said, makes it difficult in the South for the FBI to function effectively where Negroes are threatened. But the FBI is not a national police force, and it has necessarily to cooperate with local officers. J. Edgar Hoover is understandably vexed when the FBI is condemned for doing the best it can within the limits of its authority.

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