

Other People's Money

Who's Behind Hoover?

I DARE SAY every American with the smallest grain of respect for the principle of human freedom upon which this country is founded will join in the storm of protest that has gone up against the activities of Mr. J. Edgar Hoover which invade the civil liberties of American citizens. For these proceedings Hoover is denounced, Frank Murphy is censured, almost everybody is blamed except the man who is primarily responsible for the whole indecent episode.

In the first place there is nothing new about the performances of the general intelligence bureau of the Department of Justice. It was organized during the last war and functioned in its full lawless energy after the war was over. Under the leadership of A. Mitchell Palmer, Attorney General, it committed crime after crime against the liberties of citizens. At that time J. Edgar Hoover was special assistant to the Attorney General. He had an active part in organizing this bureau. He personally directed and managed many of the raids. That whole episode forms a dark chapter in our history. When those outrages were being perpetrated I did not blame J. Edgar Hoover and I do not blame him today. I blamed A. Mitchell Palmer. But in the end Palmer could not have functioned without the support of the President. And though I then admired Wilson for much that he had done, I have never forgiven him for that chapter in his administration.

The shocking performances of the Justice Department under Palmer were continued under Harry Daugherty and Warren Harding when the FBI secretly raided and searched the private papers of Senator La Follette and dogged the steps of Senator Wheeler and had him indicted on a trumped-up charge. It was not until Harlan Stone became Attorney General that he dusted the ugly elements of the FBI out of the Department and defined its powers. The Bureau, he said, would limit itself to the conduct of individuals and not to their opinions.

But increasingly the Bureau has been concerning itself with opinions. It has introduced into its functions the investigation of what it calls subversive activities. Now what are subversive activities? Communism is subversive, let us say. But what is communism? Who is a Communist? Who is to define a man's political views and activities and determine whether they are subversive or not?

In my time I have heard almost everybody I know, including some very conservative persons, called Communists. I have been called a Communist. I was once branded as a Communist before a Senate committee because I had prepared for the committee a bill to take the profits out of war which was based almost wholly upon a group of principles designed to protect the capitalist system from disintegration during a war. In New York we have a distinguished Red-baiter who likes to announce that if he were mayor he would put five feet of rubber hose into the hands of all policemen and send them out to make short

would put into their hands to enable them to decide who is a Communist. The FBI once told a Senate committee that it had given extensive scrutiny to Bolshevists and referred to the American Civil Liberties Union as an example of a Bolshevist organization. It naïvely added that the ACLU continually balked it. The implication that its work could not be carried on without collision with the defenders of civil liberties was lost on it.

Now the same J. Edgar Hoover who functioned so brilliantly during and after the war as the aide of Mr. Palmer is the head of the FBI. And of course all the wrath of the justly outraged liberal groups is leveled at Hoover. But, I should like to ask, what is Hoover doing with a general intelligence bureau investigating subversive activities and opinions? Who permitted it and, for that matter, encouraged it and approved it? Frank Murphy?

Frank Murphy, when he was Attorney General, appeared in a movie warning the nation about spies, calling on them to keep their eyes open and to send in their suspicions to the Department—to Mr. Hoover. Here was a clarion call through the most powerful instrument of propaganda—the screen—to set Americans to spying on their neighbors. Why did Frank Murphy do that? Does anybody suppose that idea popped into his own head unassisted? I have very substantial reasons for knowing that he was urged to do it—literally harried into it from another and higher quarter—and that he did it with reluctance.

He did this at the time when the President, in personal statements given from the White House to command the greatest and most explosive propaganda effect, was telling us frequently about spies and submarines hovering off our coasts and when his Assistant Secretary of War was going around—and still is—making speeches frightening people with warnings of European attacks on us “which would reduce us to the fate of Poland.”

The whole propaganda drive about spies, about internal enemies, about external attacks, originated with the President. This is his administration. The Department of Justice is one of his Cabinet departments. J. Edgar Hoover could not continue these activities for ten minutes in the administration of a man who did not approve them.

But under the new technique of political criticism, when the WPA plays politics with jobs the blame is put on Harry Hopkins; when the Commerce Department plays worse than politics with the shipping interests the man to blame is Roper; when lawless combinations walk away with the Justice Department the culprit is Homer Cummings; when politics is played with wave lengths the fault is placed on the Federal Communications Commission; when Johnny Hanes is proposed for trustee of Associated Gas the guilt belongs to the SEC or the court; when J. Edgar Hoover runs a Gestapo in the United States the fault is Murphy's. Never, it seems, is the President to blame—the President whose agents these men are, and who keeps them in office. In this case, however, the blame is so clearly traceable to the President that there can be no equivocation about it. And the liberal groups in this country would do well to open their eyes and take a good honest look at this particular matter before it goes any