

Hoover-RFK Conflict Started Early

By Drew Pearson
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There's a long and fascinating story behind the bugging battle of those two super-sleuths, J. Edgar Hoover and Sen. Bobby Kennedy.

But there are also two important morals:

1. No man should be continued in office beyond the statutory retirement age of 70; further, the position of FBI Director should rotate every five years just as the Army Chief of Staff and the Chief of Naval Operations.

2. The FBI as an organization should not be implicated in the present hair-pulling contest. It has become one of the most efficient law enforcement agencies in this or any other country and should be kept out of politics.

It is for his organization of the FBI that J. Edgar Hoover deserves the greatest credit. When he took it over as a young career officer, it was immediately after the Harding administration when the FBI was ridden with politics. William J. Burns had been appointed by Harding as FBI chief.

Hoover promptly made the FBI a career service. Up until recently it has remained so. But no man can remain in control of the secret files of Congressmen, Senators, Cabinet officers and Presidents without acquiring power beyond that compatible with a democracy—whether he uses that power or not. This is why the head of the French "Deux-

ieme Bureau"—the secret police of Paris—is considered the most powerful man in another democracy—France. And it's why the position of FBI director should be rotated in the United States.

Battle of the Bugs

The story of the bugging battle between Hoover and Bobby Kennedy goes back to the days when young Kennedy was attorney for Sen. John McClellan's rackets committee and when both McClellan and Bobby wanted to establish a national crime commission. Their idea was a national clearing house to goad lackadaisical city police forces and improve enforcement cooperation between the Federal government, the cities and the states.

Hoover was indignant. Such a commission, he felt, would supersede the FBI, would duplicate what the FBI was already supposed to be doing. His veto killed the commission.

Two years later, Hoover found himself sorying — at least in name — under the same young man who, as counsel for Sen. McClellan, had wanted to supersede him. Their relations were not good.

Significantly, Hoover was reappointed FBI Director by John F. Kennedy, even before Bobby Kennedy was appointed Attorney General. President-elect Kennedy announced his intention to reappoint Hoover as FBI chief and Allen Dulles as head of Central Intelligence as his first act

on the morning after he was elected. The Hoover appointment was considered sureweed politics. The replacement of Dulles was announced a few months after the Bay of Pigs fiasco.

Friction at the Top

When Bobby Kennedy became Attorney General on Jan. 21, 1961, he found himself technically in command of a man who had already blocked his pet idea of a national crime commission and who did not like Bobby's further idea of a crime-busting campaign against the Nation's 100 top racketeers. This was work already entrusted to Hoover and which he felt was being adequately handled. There was friction from the start. And it's significant that communications between the two men were handled by Courtney Evans, an FBI liaison officer.

Here were two men, the Attorney General and his subordinate, the FBI director, who, instead of holding personal conferences to combat crime or picking up the phone to talk to each other, used a liaison officer.

Relations were such that when Attorney General Kennedy wanted to push one of his pet prosecutions—against Teamsters' boss Jimmy Hoffa—he sidetracked Hoover and put that case under his own especially picked assistant, Walter Sheridan, now with the National Broadcasting Company.

Wiretaps and bugging unquestionably increased during

Kennedy's administration of the Justice Department. There is considerable evidence, furthermore, that eavesdropping was employed during the Hoffa trial in Nashville.

Dan Maher, attorney for the Teamsters, made an official representation to this effect to the court. He stated that after he had finished a telephone conversation from his hotel room with James E. Haggerty, another Teamster attorney, he heard the following conversation over his phone:

"Who was that?"

"Maher."

"No, it couldn't have been Maher. He's in room 523. That call came from Haggerty's room."

Maher asked the court to take note of eavesdropping, but the Justice Department issued a denial. Since the exit of Bobby Kennedy as Attorney General the Justice Department has been completely candid in confessing wholesale eavesdropping over a period of years.

Hoover, of course, was not in charge of the Hoffa investigation, though some of his FBI men were employed. The entire case against Hoffa was directly under Attorney General Kennedy, through his personal assistant, Walter Sheridan.

This is only part of the fascinating story of the battle of the bugs between the two top law enforcement officers of the nation. More will follow shortly.

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