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What About A Cold War Museum?

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A fellow tipped off by a reliable eight-year-old informant (who shall remain anonymous here) took the FBI tour the other morning to see how the bureau is handling the old Communist-menace theme now that the theme's author, J. Edgar Hoover, is dead and now that the President himself has seen fit to improve relations with both Moscow and Peking.

Sure enough, whatever else may be changing around the bureau, the familiar displays seen for decades by a million or more visitors a year are untouched—a monument to the memory, pride and anxieties of "Mr. Hoover," as the late FBI director is called by the amiable young guides.

The only evident change is an unexpectedly arty picture of Hoover, with a tribute from Mr. Nixon describing him as an "invincible and incorruptible defender of every American's precious right to be free from fear." It is something of an ironic tribute in light of Hoover's own fearful outlook on the world and his career-long effort to persuade Americans to be as fearful of communism as was he.

Otherwise, communism remains, in bold letters, "Freedom's Enemy." A map colors "countries under Communist domination" (among them Finland, by the way) in red. One display, including the mailed fist pictured below, identifies "Built-in Deficiencies of Communism"—"no free speech, compulsory youth groups," etc. To the Communist Party of the U.S.A. is laid the intent "to bring the United States into the world Communist empire."

And in what might be called the FBI's hall of fame, despite stiff competition from the likes of Ma Karpis, Machine Gun Kelly and the Brink's gang, the places of honor and full-wall displays still go to Rudolf Abel ("The Sinister Hand of Soviet Espionage") and the Rosenbergs ("The Crime of the Century—The Case of the A-Bomb Spies").

A random sampling of several guides' patter indicated a certain div-

ersity in approach to these particular exhibits. Some guides evidently describe them dutifully, while others pass them by. Questioned, one guide smiled easily and replied, "Yes, communism was one of Mr. Hoover's pet peeves."

Peeve, concern or obsession: Whatever it was, it is plain enough that the Hoover relics are quite out of phase with both the general popular attitude and the official American policy towards the "Communist menace." Surely for the good, J. Edgar Hoover's apprehensions no longer hold anywhere near the old sway. One assumes that preservation of his relics represents nothing more ominous than the kind of bureaucratic lag characteristic of governments and large organizations everywhere. He's been dead, after all, less than a year.

One also assumes that the tourist displays being prepared for the FBI's new palace, across Pennsylvania Avenue, will reflect an appropriate modernization of the menaces the FBI detects on the American scene. Handguns and drugs, for instance, should be good candidates for the bureau's dramatization.

Yet as crude and dated as these relics may be, it would be wrong, I think, simply to throw them out. They represent a huge fact or condition in the political and intellectual history of America of the last generation, and a viewpoint which many Americans—from Mr. Nixon on down—still more or less share, the onset of detente notwithstanding. Surely the FBI displays are no less authentically American, and therefore no less worthy of permanent keeping and showing, than the more conventional Americana already on display at the Smithsonian.

Maybe it would be interesting to establish a political museum of the cold war. The curators would have quite a job. The Hoover relics would go in, of course, and the text of the Truman Doctrine, Alger Hiss's typewriter, some bugs of the period, a brick from the Berlin Wall, negatives and blowups of key U-2 photos, pens with which Presidents Kennedy and Nixon signed agreements with Moscow, and so on.

The museum unquestionably would need something relating to Vietnam. One possibility is another item brought to attention by the same reliable eight-year-old informant cited above. It's the real Vietcong sampan incongruously but incontestably on exhibit amid the American guns and periscopes at the Washington Navy Yard Museum, at the foot of 8th Street SE.



FBI exhibit on communism.