

F.B.I. Suggestion Box

The call by Senator George McGovern for an investigation of the alleged "persecution" by F.B.I. director J. Edgar Hoover of one of his former agents is simply a matter of decency and justice. It could also advance the cause of effective law enforcement.

John F. Shaw, an experienced agent with a fine record and high qualifications, committed the sin of analyzing critically the effectiveness of the F.B.I. and its administration by Mr. Hoover. He did so, not with intent of public disclosure nor even by way of a disgruntled missile into a suggestion box, but in a confidential letter to a professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice where he was enrolled for advanced professional training. Mr. Shaw was so confident of his action's propriety that he gave the draft of his letter to the F.B.I. typing pool.

Subsequent events—from the unauthorized confiscation of the letter to Mr. Shaw's punitive transfer and the eventual acceptance of his resignation "with prejudice" by Mr. Hoover himself—seemed to bear out the Shaw charge that the F.B.I. suffers both from bureaucracy and from a "cult of personality." Both interfere with its basically effective operations.

Mr. Shaw wrote as a professional interested in improving the bureau, not as an enemy trying to tear it down. Specifically, he wrote: "We are not simply rooted in tradition. We're stuck in it up to our eyeballs." Governmental reports could profit from such clear language.

The immediate issue remains that Mr. Shaw has not only been separated from the F.B.I. "with prejudice" but that this derogatory status now deprives him of employment opportunities in his professional field. This is tantamount to blacklisting. Such vindictive treatment violates those liberties which the F.B.I. is supposed to protect.

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