



Garry Wills Post 6-21-71

The Right Backs Big Brother Now

THE RIGHT WING in America used to inveigh against Big Government as an Orwellian Big Brother. It was alarmed at encroachments on individual freedom, invasions of privacy, official self-aggrandizement and grabs for power. At one point an editor of the National Review even risked legal action by refusing to answer the U.S. Census "long form." He did not like being snooped on by Big Brother.

Those days are now gone. Nowhere can you find greater trust of government in its most dubious aspects than at the National Review. They now defend the government's desire to tap, bug, detain, or make mass sweeps without proper arrest (as on Mayday). The magazine's editor, William Buckley, even claims that any distrust of prosecuting officials would violate their right to "a presumption of innocence."

Recently the magazine published an article stating unequivocally that J. Edgar Hoover brought his unofficial charges against the Berrigans "at what he thought was a closed session of a Senate Appropriations subcommittee." Hoover's first charges, made before any legal action had been taken, were directed at a person (Daniel Berrigan) and an organization (The East Coast Conspiracy to Save Lives) not included in the later indictments. Hoover was wrong on two counts then—first, for accusing some people prematurely (those later indicted); and second, for accusing the wrong people (who, it turns out, could not be indicted).

EVEN THE National Review sensed there was something unsavory about this—whence their attempt to say Hoover did not mean to reveal the accusations. Not only did they have no

blabbering incompetent, censurable on those grounds. There is no way Hoover can be made to look good in this affair.

But the National Review will keep trying. Its first improbable hypothesis, spun out of thin air, has now been struck down. The magazine belatedly admits that the subcommittee chairman "would not have released the statement if Hoover had objected to it." But the editors dash forward with another wild hypothesis—that perhaps Hoover's act was "an attempt to scare off other parties whose existence the FBI knew about, but whose identity it did not, from proceeding with the same or related plot."

THE MAGAZINE, of course, cannot be sure of this hypothesis; but it wants to give Big Brother the benefit of every doubt—so it suggests that this (or some similar) specific circumstance may explain Hoover's act, to which the magazine admits there is a "generic objection." Even if the hypothesis were true, it would not cast much credit on Hoover—that he violates the rights of known persons by premature and inaccurate charges on the chance of deterring unknown persons from possible acts.

The magazine completes its whitewash job by saying that, anyway Hoover's charges "did not damage the Berrigans." I agree. The charges will, in the long run, damage Hoover and his defenders, the people who entertain any number of wild hypotheses, with only one common element in them all—the assumption that Hoover can do no wrong. Defending Hoover is now the task of sophistical charlatans—men who will defend false charges and injustice by saying that, after all, no harm was done by the unjust act. But harm was done all right. Each unjust act harms its perpetrator, and harms those who act as ideological "Mafia lawyers" for the perpetrator—in this case, Big Brother himself, and Big Brother's best friends.

evidence for this flat assertion; it took a self-induced naivete to think Hoover could not protect information of an ongoing investigation if he wanted to. Indeed, if he was incapable of making his intention clear, and enforcing it, he would be a