

An Exclusive Interview with a
Former Top FBI Official

Thirty Years with the Hoover Gang

The Real Paper

By Peter Irons

A cynic might conclude that J. Edgar Hoover planned the location of the new FBI headquarters in Washington to keep a suspicious eye on both congress and the president. Halfway between the Capitol and the White House on Pennsylvania Avenue, the J. Edgar Hoover Building looks as if the architects had tried to capture Hoover's personality in stone — squat, impenetrable, a bulldog in granite. But as the future home of the FBI's 6.5 million files nears completion, the walls of the edifice Hoover constructed during nearly 50 years to protect his reputation and power are crumbling. Revelations that Hoover and the Federal Bureau of Investigation abused their powers and perverted their functions are beginning to emerge in the press and before Congressional committees.

Liberal critics such as Max Lowenthal and Fred J. Cook have shot charges against the FBI's tough hide for years, but with little effect. "That's just an old lie from the Cook-book;" friendly journalists would be told as they were leaked rebuttals from Hoover's propaganda machine, the Crime Records Division.

But the public image of Hoover as the incorruptible, non-partisan gangbuster and scourge of the Red Menace has now been challenged from inside. I recently conducted for the Real Paper the most extensive interview ever held with a source able to reveal the top-level, carefully-guarded operations of Hoover and the FBI. The source for this story requested anonymity for legal reasons. What he revealed, however, is based on a 30-year career in the

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intelligence field, as well as complete access to all the classified documents in the FBI headquarters.

Our interview lasted more than eight hours, and was conducted in a comfortable New England country house whose bookshelves are lined with an extensive library reflecting interests in intelligence and philosophy; Ladislav Farago's "The Game of the Foxes" sits next to Georges Bernanos' "Diary of a Country Priest." Wall and mantels are lined with citations and badges from domestic and foreign intelligence agencies — Scotland Yard, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the US Air Force and the security agency of the Philippines. The former official talked candidly about the mythology surrounding Hoover and the FBI. His bitterness toward Hoover was tinged with both pride and sadness as he described the "deterioration" of the FBI under Hoover. We sat looking across the snow-covered hills as I listened to him describe his love of the land and his happiness at having left Washington. But as he eagerly pulled documents from folders to illustrate his charges against Hoover, one could sense the sorrow of a Dreyfus exiled from the French Army which he wanted to reform and serve loyally.

What I was told in this interview adds significant detail to the recent statements of Attorney General Edward Levi before the House Judiciary subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights, chaired by

Congressman Don Edwards of California. The former official made the following challenges to the public record of Hoover and the FBI:

—Hoover consistently lied to congressional committees about the strength and dangers of the Communist Party.

—Hoover's claim that the FBI conducted effective counter-intelligence against Soviet-bloc "illegal" espionage agents in the United States was untrue.

—Hoover lied when he assured Congress that the FBI operated only a "limited and carefully controlled" wiretapping and bugging program.

—Hoover misled Congress when he claimed that the FBI's investigation of the "terroristic activities of the New Left and black extremists" was producing results.

—Hoover's assertion that the FBI's "stepped-up drive against organized crime" threatened the high levels of the Mafia was a fraud.

—The claim that the FBI maintained "very fine working relations with all the intelligence agencies of the government — military and civilian" concealed violent acrimony and Hoover's refusal to share its files with the CIA and other agencies.

—Hoover cultivated the fiction that FBI files were never abused, but in fact Hoover and his chief aides frequently leaked these files to favored politicians and newspapermen.

—Hoover helped build up the careers of

right-wing politicians, including Richard Nixon and Joseph McCarthy, by providing FBI files to fuel their charges of "treason" and subversion.

—Hoover maintained a list of Protestant clergymen on a "special list" of suspected subversives to be picked up and detained in the event of a "national emergency."

—The FBI may possess crucial evidence exculpating Alger Hiss, the former State Department official convicted in 1950 for perjury in denying he had passed secret documents to the Soviet Union, in the case which made Richard Nixon a national figure.

Cherry Blossoms and Congressmen

These charges, detailed to me by the former intelligence official and in documents I have been shown by informed sources, can best be illustrated by contrasting them with the public testimony of J. Edgar Hoover. A Washington institution as predictable as the flowering of the cherry blossoms was Hoover's annual appearance before the House Appropriations subcommittee chaired for years by the reactionary New York congressman, John Rooney. Hoover would travel the few blocks from the FBI to the Capitol in his \$20,000 armored limousine, slouched down in his seat to avoid possible snipers. Flanked by his loyal aide and constant companion, Clyde Tolson, Hoover would graciously accept the flattery bestowed by Rooney, who would begin by expressing his "complete confidence" in Hoover.

On March 17, 1971, Hoover asked the Rooney subcommittee to approve an FBI budget of almost a third of a billion dollars (almost half of the total Justice Department request), which was accepted without dissent. His real concern, Hoover said, was to impress on the subcommittee the pressing need for an additional 477 FBI agents, to add to the total of almost 9,000 Special Agents on the Bureau staff. These agents were essential "to handle the ever-increasing investigative work load in the general criminal field and particularly in the internal security area where terroristic activities of the New Left and black extremists have accelerated and the intelligence activities of foreign countries have intensified."

At the time of Hoover's testimony, more than half of the fugitives on the FBI's Most Wanted List were Weathermen and New Left radicals, including Mark Rudd and Bernadine Dohrn. The FBI, Hoover said, had identified "over 1,544 individuals who adhere to the extremist strategy" of the Weatherman faction of the fractured Students for a Democratic Society. Hoover cited the convictions of the Chicago 7 and the indictments of Dohrn and Rudd and the Seattle 8 as evidence of the FBI's investigative skill.

In our interview, the former official was scornful of Hoover's boast and argued that the FBI had been almost totally frustrated in its attempts to infiltrate the Weathermen and other radical groups. "We hadn't

caught the Weatherman fugitives, we hadn't solved the Capitol bombing, we had little intelligence on these groups." The main fault, he emphasized, lay in Hoover's refusal to hire FBI agents who could pose as long-haired radicals and successfully infiltrate organizations such as SDS. "Hoover wanted his agents to be clean-cut, all-American types, and obviously they wouldn't have fit in to these groups." Consequently, the FBI was forced to rely on informers of doubtful skill and loyalty, who were often carried away in their role as provocateurs and failed to impress juries when cases came to trial.

The former official also belittled Hoover's testimony about the FBI's counter-intelligence against Soviet-bloc "illegal" agents, spies who have no legal or diplomatic cover, as opposed to "legal" agents operating from the Soviet and other embassies, the United Nations and legitimate businesses. Hoover told the Rooney subcommittee in 1971 that these "deep-cover" agents "constitute counter-intelligence problems which require much detailed and extensive investigative effort." The FBI has, in the past, apprehended Soviet KGB agents such as Kaarlo Tuomi and spies operating from "legal" cover, but many of these arrests have resulted from tips by defectors or from other intelligence agencies.

What Hoover had done, the former official told me vehemently, was to abolish or cripple many of the FBI's counter-intelligence programs. Asserting that "illegal" espionage agents were proliferating up and down the East Coast, he said that the FBI could not identify a single "illegal" spy at the time Hoover testified.

Hoover's claim that the FBI had "very fine working relations" with other government intelligence agencies was also derided. Jealous of his institutional prerogatives, Hoover had broken off relations with the CIA and other agencies and driven from the Bureau Sam Papich, the FBI liaison with the CIA, whom Hoover suspected of undermining him.

Fundamentalist anti-communism was the rock on which Hoover built his career. But in a perverse way, Hoover functioned as a press agent for the Communist Party. Testifying before the Rooney subcommittee, Hoover cited without challenge Party leader Gus Hall's claim of 15,000 members, and reiterated his 1946 estimate that ten sympathizers lurked behind every Party member. Accepting these suspect figures helped Hoover justify his appeals for additional funds and agents to combat the Communist Party, which Hoover said was "riding the crest of optimism."

However, Hoover's public statement about Party membership was challenged in a document that I was shown, prepared by an authority on the Communist Party knowledgeable about FBI infiltration of the Party. This document revealed that, as of 1971, the total membership of the Party was only 2,800, half of whom were elderly, inactive members. The document accused

Hoover of having "caused a Communist scare in the Nation which was entirely unwarranted."

Hoover's continuing obsession with the Communist Party helped precipitate a major internal split in the FBI several years ago. William C. Sullivan, the third-ranking official in the Bureau and head of its Domestic Intelligence Division, made a speech in 1970 in which he said that the Communist Party "is not in any way causing or directing or controlling the unrest we suffer today in the racial field and in the academic community." In a 1974 conversation with Sullivan, he told me that Hoover had blown up at him: "How do you expect us to get appropriations from Congress if you downgrade the Communist Party." Sullivan was fired a year later.

In our interview, the former official challenged Hoover's repeated testimony that FBI files were sacrosanct and never leaked. Not only did Hoover maintain secret files on political figures, as Attorney General Levi acknowledged just recently, but these and other FBI files were often leaked to right-wing politicians and favored newsmen. Hoover helped "build up Richard Nixon as a great anti-communist politician" by leaking files to Nixon during his entire career, and similarly fueled Joe McCarthy's rabid charges of communist infiltration of government with leaked files. Two of the favored newsmen to whom files were leaked, I was told, were Walter Trohan of the Chicago Tribune and Jeremiah O'Leary of the Washington Star. For example, the former official said, when the FBI was tapping the phones of newsmen and members of Henry Kissinger's National Security Council staff between 1969 and 1971, Hoover called in friendly newsmen, "brought down one of his stooges from the Crime Records Division, and told the newsmen that he should know that Tony Lake was a security suspect while he had access to classified material." Lake was a Kissinger aide who was later cleared of complicity in the leaks the FBI was investigating.

In his 1971 testimony, Hoover claimed that the FBI was "operating 33 telephone surveillances and four microphone installations in Bureau cases in the security field." Rooney's subcommittee accepted Hoover's statement without question. And Hoover took pains to denounce as "absolutely untrue" a news report that large numbers of FBI taps and bugs were removed prior to Hoover's annual congressional appearance and restored as soon as he returned to his office. But the former official emphatically agreed with this charge. The FBI "had a real racket going" to conceal from the public the extent of FBI tapping and bugging, he told me.

By limiting his testimony to "Bureau cases," Hoover was also able to escape reporting on taps performed for the CIA and other intelligence agencies, and the unauthorized taps which former FBI agent William Turner characterized as "suicide taps," those installed by an agent without authority. In fact, under the reporting

procedures established by the Crime Control Act of 1968, the federal courts have revealed that over one million conversations were tapped between 1969 and 1971.

Hoover's boasting about the FBI's "stepped-up drive against organized crime" was also challenged in documents I was shown. The Bureau had been reluctant for years to tackle the Mafia, they revealed. In fact, Hoover even refused to acknowledge the existence of an organized crime syndicate, until the FBI was pressured by Congress and Robert Kennedy, when he served as attorney general, to begin investigative work. Most of the FBI's effort was directed at the lower levels of petty gambling, leaving unscathed the Mafia's penetration of legitimate business. Reporter Hank Messick, who specializes in organized crime, wrote in his biography of Hoover that top FBI officials had close connections with crime figures, who donated large sums to the J. Edgar Hoover Foundation, controlled by Hoover aides Lou Nichols and Cartha DeLoach.

I was also shown a document alleging that Hoover conducted a campaign designed to convince the public that the Protestant clergy was honeycombed with communist sympathizers, and that Hoover personally slandered a top official of the National Council of Churches with claims that he was a communist. The document also revealed that Hoover maintained a "special list" of twelve Protestant ministers who were to be picked up and detained in the event of a "national emergency." Presumably this refers to the secret list compiled by Hoover under authorization of Title II of the Internal Security Act of 1950, sponsored by Senator Hubert Humphrey, under which suspected subversives would be detained in concentration camps on declaration of an "Internal Security Emergency." Congress repealed this act in 1971, but Hoover's list existed for more than twenty years.

The Real Paper interview also revealed that the FBI may possess, in spite of past denials, crucial evidence which could exculpate Alger Hiss. It was the Hiss case which propelled Richard Nixon to national prominence and the Vice-Presidency. In 1948, Nixon's friend and Time magazine editor Whittaker Chambers produced secret State Department documents which he said Hiss, a former State Department official and advisor to Roosevelt at the Yalta conference, had passed to him a decade earlier for transmission to the Soviet Union. The crucial question in the Hiss trials was whether the incriminating documents had been typed on Hiss's personal typewriter, as Chambers claimed. More than 60 FBI agents searched the country for the typewriter, supposedly without success. The typewriter was finally located by the Hiss defense itself and, to their astonishment, matched the type on the Chambers documents. It was not until after Hiss began serving his five-year sentence that his attorneys suspected that the typewriter was a forgery.

"To the best of my knowledge," the former official told me, "the FBI did have the typewriter" before it was found by the Hiss defense, although he was not sure whether it had been located by the FBI or brought to the Bureau labs by Nixon. If this account is accurate, evidence in the FBI files could indicate whether Hiss was framed. Nixon himself stated, both in his book "Six Crises" and in a taped White House conversation with John Dean in 1973, that he had found the disputed typewriter, although he quickly retracted his published account. It is possible to construct a plausible scenario that the FBI discovered that the typewriter did not match the Chambers documents, which would have destroyed Nixon's career, and that a forged typewriter was constructed and planted, with the Hiss defense later unsuspectingly led to it. I have requested FBI files bearing on this question from current Director Clarence Kelley, in an attempt to investigate the possibility raised by the former official in our interview.

The Rule of Fear

Never before has the Hoover mythology been attacked by a source with direct, personal knowledge of the inner workings of the FBI, who was able to confirm charges previously made by Bureau critics (and uniformly denied by Hoover) and add new details to the picture of Hoover and the FBI. How was Hoover able, for almost half a century, to maintain an image of the FBI as an incorruptible, non-partisan agency, and to stifle and counter his critics?

One factor is what the former official called the "rule of fear" in the FBI. Bureau employees are not protected by Civil Service regulations; they can be, and many times have been fired or disciplined by Hoover for expressing the slightest dissent. What happened to Special Agent John Shaw in 1970 is typical. Shaw had written a private letter to a college professor, voicing mild criticism of Bureau procedures while defending it against many charges. Shaw's real sin was that he bluntly described the "cult of personality" built up to protect Hoover's power. After a copy of the letter was fished out of his wastebasket and pieced together by Bureau agents, Shaw was summarily fired "with prejudice," which effectively ruined his career in law enforcement. There is a wry joke in the Bureau that Hoover's loyal aide Clyde Tolson asked one day to go home, telling Hoover he felt depressed. "If you're depressed, Clyde," Hoover replied, "you don't have to go home. Why don't you fire somebody?" Tolson brightened up "Can I fire him with prejudice, Mr. Hoover?"

Agents who incurred Hoover's wrath but escaped dismissal faced exile to such Bureau Siberias as Butte, Montana and Oklahoma City. The Special Agent in charge of these offices would be instructed by Hoover to assign the offending agent to the worst cases and to "give him a rough time." Agents were disciplined or exiled for such petty affronts to Hoover's puritanism as having long sideburns or being

photographed smoking a cigarette. Facing such peremptory action, agents were understandably reluctant to jeopardize their careers.

Another factor is the favorable press that Hoover and the FBI enjoyed for almost half a century. This image was carefully cultivated. Cooperative newsmen and columnists were rewarded with "inside" material leaked from FBI files, and agents were forbidden by Hoover to talk to those on the media blacklist. For instance, the former official revealed to me that Hoover placed one of the television networks on the blacklist for allowing an airline pilot to voice criticism of the FBI's handling of an airline hijacking. The FBI propaganda machine is centered in the Crime Records Division, which has churned out literally tons of favorable publicity, extended lavish support to film companies and television programs lauding the FBI, and kept meticulous track of every piece of press criticism.

A third factor, probably the most potent deterrent, lay in the fear of many potential critics that FBI files might be used against them. Attorney General Levi recently confirmed that Hoover kept derogatory files on 17 members of Congress and many other public figures. The former official told me that Hoover aide Cartha "Deke" DeLoach, a crony of Lyndon Johnson and FBI liaison to the White House, circulated the tapes of Martin Luther King's bedroom activities, which effectively stifled King's attacks on the FBI. Johnson enjoyed regaling his friends with scatological details from FBI files which Hoover made available, a practice dating back to the Roosevelt administration. Former Attorney General Francis Biddle related Hoover's delight in sharing "intimate details" of the escapades of Cabinet members.

In another case, an FBI agent acting on Hoover's orders sent anonymous letters attacking Arizona State University professor Morris Starsky to a college committee reviewing the tenure application of the anti-war activist in 1970. The former official told me that Hoover himself sent a "rude, vulgar" letter to the president of American University in an attempt to have a Bureau critic fired from the faculty.

(I had a personal taste of the Bureau's looseness with files in 1961, when I was a student at Antioch College and had been circulating anti-draft leaflets to other campuses. Two FBI agents, the stereotyped crew-cut men in trench coats, showed up one day to interrogate me about my involvement in the anti-draft movement. We spent several hours in their car, parked in front of the student union, while they asked me such questions as "which version of the Bible do you read?" Needless to say, they were highly visible on the Antioch campus and another student wrote Ohio Senator Frank Lausche to complain that the Bureau was harassing me (in fact, they had threatened to arrest me for sedition). The student who wrote Lausche received from him, obviously through a mistake in his of-

file, a copy of my FBI file. I was undoubtedly a minor-league subversive to the FBI, but the file contained more than twenty pages, including photocopies of petitions I had signed for the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, the NAACP and other organizations, reports on meetings I had attended and statements I had made at very obscure and private meetings. The file was soon stolen from me, and we later learned that there had been at least two FBI informants on the Antioch campus.)

Few people have had an opportunity to examine their FBI files, but fear of their disclosure certainly has inhibited many potential critics of the Bureau, especially those in Congress. The extent of the FBI's surveillance and penetration of political groups, not only radical organizations but liberal ones as well, is massive and has been documented by the Media files (stolen in 1971 from an FBI office near Philadelphia) and reports on the Bureau's counter-intelligence program, known as COINTELPRO, reluctantly released by the Justice Department last fall after press disclosure and a Freedom of Information Act suit.

The Media documents provide the most extensive knowledge yet of the FBI's intelligence operations. They indicate that almost half of the Bureau's time has been spent on political intelligence, rather than enforcement of the federal criminal laws. Hundreds of groups were spied upon and infiltrated, and information was solicited from local police, college officials, telephone operators and neighbors of suspected subversives. Although the ostensible purpose of COINTELPRO was to identify and monitor violence-prone groups, practically none of the Media documents reveal any such intelligence. Congressman Don Edwards of California, a former FBI agent, described COINTELPRO as "2,370 incidents of overt action to disrupt and damage persons and organizations viewed by the Bureau as dangerous to our national security." And former Special Agent Robert Wall has acknowledged taking part in a dozen illegal burglaries of the homes and offices of suspected radicals, and other COINTELPRO actions included attempts to sow dissension by planting false charges of corruption and ideological deviation, and by disrupting demonstrations.

One motivation behind COINTELPRO, as expressed in one of the Media documents, was to make those active in anti-war and civil rights groups suspicious of surveillance to "enhance the paranoia endemic in these circles" and "to get the point across that there is an FBI agent behind every mailbox." The FBI can't read everyone's mail or tap every telephone, but it has succeeded in enhancing the paranoia on the left; thousands of activists are conscious of every click and hum on their phones.

The Sullivan Memo

Congress has begun to subject the FBI to its first intensive scrutiny in its history. The newly-established select committees headed by Senator Frank Church and Representative Lucian Nedzi will soon begin probing the FBI, CIA and seventeen other government intelligence agencies, and the House Judiciary subcommittee headed by Don Edwards has uncovered some of Hoover's secret files. Probably the most explosive testimony before these committees, according to the former official, will come from former Assistant to the Director William C. Sullivan, whose FBI service began in 1940 and continued until Hoover fired him in 1971. Sullivan headed the Domestic Intelligence Division of the Bureau from the early 1960s until 1970, and directed the infiltration and surveillance of anti-war and black groups.

For most of his career Sullivan functioned as an authority on the Communist Party, but he became convinced during the 1960s that the New Left had replaced the Party as the major threat to internal security. Nothing could have been more heretical to Hoover, who had invested millions of dollars and countless agents to monitor the Party and infiltrate it at the highest levels. A few weeks after being denounced by Hoover for asserting that the Party was not pulling the strings of the New Left, Sullivan returned from sick leave to find his office locks changed and his Bureau career ended.

Shortly before Sullivan was fired, according to an FBI interview with John Mitchell during the Watergate probe, Hoover showed Mitchell "a lengthy letter he . . . received from Sullivan in which Sullivan accused Hoover of running contrary to the President's wishes in many instances." Mitchell characterized Sullivan as "a little nuts" and advised Hoover to fire him. Informed sources report that Sullivan had sent Hoover a 13-page letter listing some 28 areas in which Hoover had mismanaged the FBI and deceived the public, Congress and the White House.

Another document prepared by Sullivan is in the hands of the Edwards subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights, and subcommittee counsel Alan A. Parker told me that Sullivan will be called to testify about his knowledge of the FBI. The story behind the Sullivan memo is part of the Watergate saga. During Nixon's frantic efforts in early 1973 to block the Watergate inquiry, he was furious at the FBI's tenacious investigation and lamented the death of Hoover: "He'd have fired a few people or he'd have scared them to death. He's got files on everybody, God damn it," he told John Dean. Dean suggested enlisting Sullivan in a White House counter-attack. Sullivan, Dean told Nixon, is "a reliable man who thinks a great deal of this Administration and of you."

Calling Sullivan to the White House, Dean asked him to prepare a memo detailing prior political uses of the FBI. What

Dean had in mind, he told Nixon, was evidence of FBI involvement in the Walter Jenkins affair, involving an aide to Johnson arrested as a homosexual, the bugging of Martin Luther King, Kennedy's use of the Bureau to harass steel company executives, and other incidents involving Democratic presidents. A source with knowledge of the episode told me that Sullivan had no love for Dean or Nixon, and agreed only to describe incidents about which he was willing to testify before a congressional committee, and that he also advised Dean that all those involved in Watergate should accept their culpability and take the consequences.

I also learned that Dean had once called an FBI official and said, "This is the Counsel to the President. I'd like to have you do something for me — I'm going out with a girl tonight; would you run her name through the Bureau files." The startled and annoyed official called Dean back, having done no such thing, and replied truthfully, "I don't know of anything derogatory about her in the FBI files."

Nixon and Dean later discussed the best method to leak the information contained in the memo Sullivan prepared. Nixon suggested giving it to the right-wing magazine U.S. News and World Report, but Dean said he had turned it over to White House aide William Baroody to use in preparing a speech for Barry Goldwater. But the Sullivan memo, which Dean later turned over to the Senate Watergate Committee, has not yet been released, and Nixon's only public use of it was to claim in an August, 1973 press conference that prior Democratic presidents had engaged in widespread wiretapping. However, informed sources report that the memo, in addition to the incidents described above, detailed a history of illegal burglaries conducted by the FBI for more than thirty years, including foreign embassies, surveillance of the staffs and opponents of presidents back to Franklin Roosevelt, the bugging of Robert Kennedy at the 1964 Democratic convention, the FBI alliance with Senator Joe McCarthy, FBI spying on Barry Goldwater in 1964 and Spiro Agnew in 1968, and Hoover's leaking of "dirty and smutty" material from FBI files to several presidents.

Sullivan's direct knowledge of other illegal FBI activities is also likely to be probed by congressional committees. In 1969, after Henry Kissinger blew up at a New York Times article by William Beecher revealing American bombing of Cambodia, Sullivan was asked by General Alexander Haig of Kissinger's staff to install FBI wiretaps of seventeen possible sources of the leaks to Beecher, including four newsmen and six members of Kissinger's National Security Council staff. Documents secured by the House Judiciary Committee indicate that Kissinger committed perjury in his sworn denials that he had not authorized the taps installed under

Sullivan's supervision or selected those to be tapped. Ironically, the record shows that none of those tapped was responsible for the leaks, although the taps led directly to the dismissal of the charges against Daniel Ellsberg, when the government revealed that Ellsberg had been overheard on a tap of Morton Halperin's phone. Halperin is now suing both Kissinger and Sullivan for their roles in the tapping. As part of another attempt to trace leaks, Sullivan travelled to France in 1969 to enlist the cooperation of the French police in bugging the hotel room and phone of Joseph Kraft, the syndicated columnist.

Sullivan also worked closely with White House aide Tom Charles Huston in formulating the ill-fated "Huston Plan" of 1970 to use illegal break-ins and mail coverage to secure intelligence on New Left activity. For ten years, Sullivan represented the FBI on the United States Intelligence Board, working with USIB members Admiral Noel Gaylor, head of the National Security Agency, and General D.V. Bennett, head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, on the Huston Plan. Although Hoover, suspicious of other intelligence agencies and jealous of his prerogatives, successfully blocked implementation of the Huston Plan, Huston told me in a recent phone interview that representatives of all the agencies involved, including the FBI, supported the program until Hoover objected.

With his voice reflecting both resignation and resentment, the former official, discussing the Sullivan memo summed up his view of the FBI under Hoover. "The Bureau is not what it seems to be," he told me. "There is ample evidence of intellectual, moral, and financial corruption. It had become a totalitarian agency under Hoover, and it is still controlled by the Hoover gang." ■

Hoover for President? Chief Justice Hoover?

J. Edgar Hoover's political ambitions have been hinted at by historians, but the former top FBI official related two incidents, never before revealed, which indicate that the non-partisan image cultivated by Hoover and the FBI was a myth.

In 1936, the former official said, Hoover considered seeking the Republican nomination to run against Franklin Roosevelt, who had disregarded Hoover's warnings against recognition of the Soviet Union and had staffed the New Deal agencies with persons Hoover considered communists. FBI agents around the country were instructed to solicit support from local police chiefs. But almost without exception they reported that the chiefs detested Hoover for the FBI's headline-grabbing, and would not support his political ambitions under any circumstances.

This cold reception may have blunted Hoover's desire to seek office himself, but it didn't dissuade him from trying to influence presidential elections. Roosevelt had tolerated Hoover (whether he knew of Hoover's 1936 ambitions is unknown), and had brushed aside Hoover's warnings during World War II that Soviet sympathizers exercised too much influence in the White House and State Department. But the first president to actively challenge Hoover's power was Harry Truman, who failed to accord Hoover the deference he demanded.

In 1945, Hoover sent Truman a memo charging that Harry Dexter White, assistant treasury secretary, was a Russian agent transmitting secret documents to a Soviet courier. Truman disregarded this memo and went ahead with his appointment of White to a high international monetary post. Hoover was infuriated, and later forced Truman to institute a federal employee loyalty program. Truman's establishment of the CIA in 1947 further frustrated Hoover's ambitions and produced another clash. The former official told me that Truman yelled to his aides "Hoover's got a goddamned Gestapo in

this country, and now he wants a world-wide Gestapo." (I have also seen a document showing that Truman told his Counsel, Clark Clifford, that he was "very strongly anti-FBI" and labeled the Bureau a potential Gestapo.)

Hoover's reaction to his feud with Truman, I was told, was to work for Truman's defeat in 1948. What Hoover wanted, the former official said, was to be appointed attorney general by a Republican president, and ultimately gain a seat on the Supreme Court. The former official was emphatic about Hoover's role in the 1948 election. "Talk about politics, the FBI was up to its ears. The Bureau worked day and night to defeat Truman and elect Tom Dewey," his Republican opponent.

The FBI first assisted Dewey, I was told, in his primary campaign against Harold Stassen, and during the election FBI documents were flown from Washington to Dewey's office in Albany in private planes. A major issue in the campaign was Republican charges that Truman was "soft on communism," and the public testimony that Alger Hiss had been an espionage agent were carefully timed to explode three months before the election. One participant in the Hiss case, Father John F. Cronin, told me that an FBI agent would phone him every day with details of the FBI's case against Hiss, which Cronin would relay to Richard Nixon, who was in close contact with Dewey.

But Truman confounded the pollsters with his razor-thin victory over Dewey. Hoover's response, the former official said, was to blame the debacle on Lou Nichols, the aide Hoover expected to replace him as FBI Director. "You pushed me out on a limb and then sawed it off," Hoover was quoted as telling Nichols, in the account I was given. Although Dewey lost and Hoover's dream of becoming Mr. Justice Hoover was shattered, the FBI's assistance to Richard Nixon in the Hiss case ultimately helped him into the White House.