

Post 1/6/75 *In Defense of the FBI*

The cumulative effect of the massive volume of one-sided adverse criticism emanating from the news media against the FBI during the past year—on occasion even reaching intemperate levels of abuse—in my opinion, threatens to destroy this great agency.

The FBI has been lampooned and headlined by every type of media as burglars, bunglers, blackmailers, and abusers of civil rights and awesome power. To distinguish the fair and balanced reporting—of which there has been considerable—is, unfortunately, impossible, as the unbridled voracity of the overall attack has drowned out the fairer voices.

I hold no brief for J. Edgar Hoover or the FBI for any wrong they may have done, but I am incensed—as all fair persons should be—about unfair charges; the over-features of derogatory hearsay and speculation; the half-true, half-false feature articles about the FBI written in a satirical and demeaning vein; the failure to take any cognizance of the over 90 per cent of the work of the FBI which is above question; and the failure to reflect that practically all of the information developed about the FBI has been produced through the assistance and full cooperation of that agency.

With great damage already done, we are only now able to glean that the FBI didn't go out on its own and intercept communications to and from Communist countries, but did so under presidential directive supported by congressional appropriation legislation; that the same thing holds true respecting FBI counterintelligence investigations, wire taps, and other activities relating to subversive activities and national security; that the FBI did obtain prior authority for such wire taps from the attorneys general, as prescribed in presidential directive; and that the FBI also made a practice of informing the attorneys general, in detail, of their procedures in attempting to penetrate and thwart groups which appeared to be a threat to the public safety, even though the attorneys general reportedly didn't read the memoranda.

It also now seems clear that the FBI was not swollen with excessive power, as alleged, but over-burdened with the enormous responsibilities which, because of its outstanding record and performance, succeeding presidents and Congresses kept heaping upon it down through the years, beginning with World War II.

Perhaps over-simplified—and aside from the volumes of charges, derogatory

gossip, and speculation about J. Edgar Hoover, who is dead and can't defend himself—this leaves us with the mistakes the FBI has made in carrying out its duties. And, with over 7,000 agents and a workload of upwards of 200 different categories of investigative responsibilities, the FBI did make mistakes. But whatever its mistakes, or misjudgments, they would seem to have been directly connected with its efforts to carry out its assigned responsibility.

Regarding complaints as to civil rights infringement, I am in no position to comment, but by any measure, the FBI, in the manner in which it has conducted itself from the beginning, in its treatment of persons charged with wrong doing, by its national police schools, and its investigation of innumerable civil rights complaints, has done more to enforce, uphold, and protect civil rights than any other agency or group in the world.

Whatever may be said about J. Edgar Hoover, it can't be denied that, in the FBI, he left the country a heritage for which it should be most grateful.

The FBI, in spite of the damage to its reputation, is still a great and necessary institution, and, in spite of all the hysteria and clamor of the day, there is surely the wisdom and soundness in the Congress, when all of this is over, to write a fair report and recommend adequate controls and oversight measures, which the FBI reportedly welcomes, without hamstringing and sterilizing its effectiveness.

It would also seem of great importance for the news media to establish a fairer code of ethics respecting what it dispenses as news and by-products.

During my 37 years government tenure, I spent four years as an FBI Agent; four years in the Criminal Division of the Department of Justice in charge of the Espionage Desk, primarily collaborating with FBI agents and U.S. attorneys in the preparation and trial of major espionage cases; twelve years as a staff member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, which held hearings and passed upon the yearly FBI budget requests. On the basis of this experience, I must reject as preposterous any implication that the FBI received any special treatment because of information it might have had on members of the Committee. My personal opinion of the worth of the FBI is such that if I could but start my government career over again, I would want to start as an FBI agent.

PAUL J. COTTER

Dickerson, Md.