

Tribal Hate in Belfast Children--

An Affront by the Protestant Apprentice

By D. J. R. Bruckner

THE disintegration of the image of J. Edgar Hoover is really quite impressive. It compensates one for having been born too late to see the Titanic sink.

There is a lot to laugh at in this situation. Bullet-proof cars stand ready in Washington, New York, Los Angeles and Miami to whisk the FBI director around in safety. But the agency was not able to protect its own records from theft in Media, Pa. A Washington columnist was able recently to collect and publish the contents of Hoover's trash can—rich dinner menus and empty Gelusil wrappers. Some agents are making public criticisms of the FBI from within, and Congress, for the first time, is battling over Hoover in public.

But there are issues involved here that are much more important than either this agency or this man.

Police power is about as tough a political issue as you can raise. Government has the right to use force to protect society from the unreasonable exercises of personal liberty. Unfortunately, history suggests that an attack on the government's police powers usually leads to more repressive laws.

It is entirely too easy to abuse Hoover or the attorney general for the government's pervasive information gathering activities, for instance. Every citizen is involved in this business, too. Among the documents stolen from the FBI office in Media we find mention of a lay brother on a Catholic monastery who informed the FBI that a priest of the monastery, who is a sympathizer of the Berrigan brothers, had borrowed a monastery car "for the entire weekend" before the March 1 bombing of the Capitol. If that happens in a monastery, are you entirely comfortable about what your neighbors are saying about you, or you about them?

The Media documents also make it pretty clear that the Justice Department and the FBI are stepping up their snooping into colleges, the black communities, the New Left. Assistant Attorney General Robert Mardian told a Senate subcommittee recently that there are no specific, published, or regular guidelines for agents involved in this snooping. A Justice Department aide, defending Hoover, said it was Attorney General John N. Mitchell, not Hoover, who ordered the enlistment of informants younger than 25, as young as 18, in fact.

One of the Media documents reveals that the FBI is seeking informants on blacks and left-wingers. It specifically suggests development as informers of bartenders, barbers, janitors, taxi drivers, salesmen, newsboys and bill collectors.

Unfortunately, all these types of informants can be developed. There is a suspicious nosiness in the American character that can be too easily exploited. Everybody

assumes a moral claim over everybody else's reputation without sufficiently reflecting that individual liberties ultimately rest, as the legal scholar and educator Edward Levi puts it, on "the civilities of a reasonably united community."

Reasonably united? Rep. Hale Boggs (D-La.) accuses the FBI of tapping his telephone.

Well, congressmen sometimes commit crimes and must be prosecuted, which means they come under the eye of the Justice Department. But the importance of Boggs' outburst is that it epitomizes the very real fear, the sense of intimidation you find now among government officials not only in Washington, but out on the states, counties and cities.

Last week the Supreme Court approved the use of evidence gathered by government agents carrying secret recording devices. In his dissent Justice John M. Harlan said the suspicion arising from such a practice could "smother that spontaneity . . . that liberates daily life." He is right. Just be careful about what you say to your bartender, barber, janitor, hacker, newsboy or fellow student or brother monk. Wired or unwired, you may be whispering into a rat's ear.

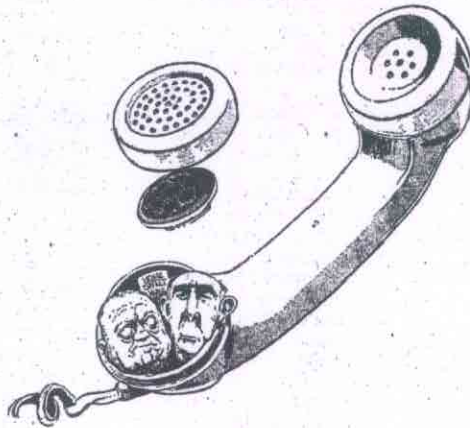
You would not look for spontaneity in the FBI. As its agents dissent in public, we are seeing it as an organization endangered by discontent, competition, envy, gossip, suspicion, even personal malevolence. Look at it, and you are looking into a mirror; the agency is quite a lot like the rest of us.

There is a temptation among many to try to write strict laws controlling this agency

Boys of Derry

and the rest of the government's policing and information-gathering apparatus. There is room for some specific, legislated restraint. But, if the effort to discipline police powers becomes a public political campaign, it is almost certain to fail.

The best method of dealing with this problem, it would seem, is for Congress and the courts, but especially Congress, to assert and maintain much closer regular control not only over the FBI, but over the entire



Wright in the Miami Daily News.

enforcement function of the Executive Branch.

When you come down to it, police work is a matter of balance, and it is the constitutional obligation of Congress and the courts to maintain the balance.

Los Angeles Times

The Washington Post

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PHILIP L. GRAHAM, 1915-1963

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