

At the FBI, Reform at Last?

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SLOWLY BUT SURELY, Clarence Kelley is bringing structural reform to the FBI. On Wednesday, he announced what amounts to some of the most significant changes the agency has seen since the death of J. Edgar Hoover. In doing so, Mr. Kelley acknowledged that his pace of changing the bureau has been "deliberate." He said he expects the criticism of that pace to continue, which is fair enough. Given the state of affairs confronting him, no harm will be done if the pressure is, in fact, kept on; there is much that remains to be done. But the fact that Mr. Kelley is moving at an almost agonizingly slow rate of speed takes nothing away from the importance of the changes that he made public this week.

The single most important change Mr. Kelley announced was the transfer of the domestic intelligence activities of the bureau to the general investigative division. Those who have been encouraging reform within the bureau have long argued that such a move would reduce substantially the danger of the abuse of citizens' rights of the sort that has been paraded across the nation's front pages for the past several months—burglaries, assorted illegal wiretaps and the like. But this change, coupled with the guidelines for domestic intelligence issued earlier by Attorney General Edward H. Levi, will make such abuse much less likely to occur in the future. The reason is that the general investigation division is in the business of preparing cases that will lead to prosecution. It has not been in the business of general snooping about for derogatory information about those with whose politics agents disagree. And by placing the FBI Office of Legal Counsel in direct access to the director, Mr. Kelley has strengthened his own ability to keep tabs on what is going on in his agency.

That the FBI director still has a long way to go was painfully illustrated by Mr. Kelley's appearance last Sunday on the CBS News television program, "Face the Nation." Mr. Kelley was asked who in the hierarchy of the FBI deceived him by telling him that surreptitious burglaries had been stopped. Even though it was a deception perpetrated on Mr. Kelley some time ago, he had to confess on nationwide television that he still doesn't know who within the FBI had led him astray. This is a proposition that, frankly, we find almost impossible to comprehend; it would seem self-evident that whoever gave him the misinformation deceived him, or was in fact deceived by subordinates. It is hard, on the face of it, to see why a

few phone calls couldn't get to the bottom of it all. But the director's problem becomes at least a little easier to understand when you study the transcript of that CBS appearance, portions of which are available for your inspection on the opposite page. What you learn from Mr. Kelley's various responses is simply that after more than two years on the job he is not in charge of the bureau he is supposed to direct. Worse, one suspects that the bureau as it is presently constituted is not manageable—that vast numbers of employees remain blindly loyal to their own memory of the late J. Edgar Hoover and sublimely indifferent to what has already been revealed about the venality, corruption and intimidation that evidently became an accepted way of life during Mr. Hoover's long autocracy. Thus, apparently to hold any control, Mr. Kelley seems to find it necessary to preface any discussion of the problem with a protestation that he, of course, would not wish to speak ill of Mr. Hoover, though how he could discuss his difficulties seriously without doing so is beyond us. Plaintively, he talks of the "loyalty" to Mr. Hoover of great numbers of his underlings—a "loyalty" for which attrition seems to be the only cure.

It is not a promising state of affairs. And that is why we stress the point that Mr. Kelley, and perhaps future directors, may have a long way to go before the bureau can again enjoy the public respect and confidence it so badly needs. Many of the old Hoover elements are still firmly entrenched in the hierarchy, and Mr. Kelley has shown only a very limited disposition, let alone an ability, to root them out. What's worse, he seems to think only a small number of persons within the bureau should be disciplined for their part in violating the law and trampling on the liberties of American citizens. Yet, the evidence is that substantial numbers of persons were responsible for acts that warrant some official sanction. It might restore some of the public's confidence in Mr. Kelley's leadership if he stopped beating around the bush and frankly and comprehensively stated what he thinks was really so dreadfully wrong about the Hoover years. He made an attempt to do that in a speech at Fulton, Mo., months back, but he has since retreated to saying, as he did again on Sunday, "I am not critical" of Mr. Hoover. With a definitive bill of particulars recorded, bearing the director's imprimatur, he might be on much stronger ground to proceed from the changes he has already announced to the sort of wholesale house-cleaning that remains to be done.