

Jack Anderson

Post 3/4/73

Revitalizing the Bureau

A few nights ago, wealthy businessman Norman Brody delivered \$200,000 in ransom to a pick-up point in the Maryland suburbs. The FBI had slipped an electronic homing device in the package with the cash and had staked dozens of agents in the area.

Yet the kidnapers of Brody's 16-year-old son, William, easily slipped through the FBI dragnet, picked up the package, tore off the wrappings and escaped with the cash. Meanwhile, the device started beeping and caused a flurry of activity at control headquarters. It turned out that a disgruntled agent had triggered the gadget by kicking the discarded package.

Fortunately, the boy was released unharmed four hours later. But the incident demonstrates that the FBI is no

longer the invincible citadel it's cracked up to be. Most Americans have seen enough of Efrem Zimbalist Jr. on TV to know that FBI agents are master criminologists who track down kidnapers, thieves, embezzlers, spies and other brigands with fingerprints, tire casts, paint specks and fingernail parings. They may be disillusioned to learn, therefore, that the FBI has become increasingly ineffective in real life.

The successes of the FBI have become so much a part of the American culture that people can be bored by their retelling. The late J. Edgar Hoover, certainly, did a superb job in building the bureau into an extremely effective crime-fighting unit. When he took over as director, the FBI was loaded with hacks, misfits, drunks and courthouse hangers-on. In a remarkably brief time, he transformed it into a formidable organization with an *esprit de corps* exceeding that of the Marines.

Some of this was accomplished by hiring the best men available, training them well, convincing them they were the best, then selling the public on the idea that the FBI was ready to protect the nation from any emergency.

But in recent years, the FBI has deteriorated badly. Its morale has been shattered; its methods are out-dated; its attitudes have become stilted. At a time when drug-related crimes are bringing chaos to our big cities, FBI agents are off chasing stolen automobiles. In an age of long-haired revolutionaries and Mafia crime empires, the FBI is still geared to go after the likes of John Dillinger, Baby Face Nelson and Alvin "Kreepy" Karpis.

FBI agents, with their short hair styles and impeccable appearance, are incapable of infiltrating the revolutionary movement or the Mafia. "An FBI man's idea of infiltrating a radical group," a narcotics agent told us scornfully, "is to take his tie off." Instead, the FBI tries to bribe informers to pass on information. Small-fry hoodlums are offered immunity in return for their cooperation. The FBI even distributes secret telephone numbers to the street people, hoping a potential informer will call and offer information in return for a suitable reward. This system has produced unstable and

unreliable informers who are more interested in getting paid than in getting convictions. Result: the FBI has been forced to bring sleazy informers into court, with notoriously unfavorable results. Its own pressed and pomaded agents, increasingly, have become merely collectors of raw gossip.

All too often, the gossip has nothing whatsoever to do with real or suspected criminals. We have had access to confidential FBI files. We found a report on the sex life of movie actor Rock Hudson, the love affairs of football hero Joe Namath, the political activities of movie star Marlon Brando and the peace proclivity of comedian Tony Randall. Not one of these individuals, according to their files, has the slightest connection with any illegal activity.

A memo in Randall's file, for example, discloses he "was one of several individuals who appeared at a Read-In for Peace in New York City..." Playwrite-actor Ossie Davis went to a similar read-in, and the FBI noted ominously that he "read from the Sacred Scripture." Boxer Mohammad Ali, whom the FBI insists on calling Cassius Clay, aroused the bureau's dark suspicions when he discussed "the possibility of going to China in about August, 1972." President Nixon's trip to Peking six months earlier, presumably, didn't disturb the FBI.

One of the super-sensitive paragraphs in black writer James Baldwin's file reports: "Baldwin's method of working is strange. There are times when he writes continuously for 24 hours without food and drink. Under such circumstances, he does not even notice if you shout at him or hit him on the shoulder. Afterwards, he lies down and sleeps. Moreover, he is in a sound sleep for 48 hours."

J. Edgar Hoover built his force on agents from scratch. The time has come to reform and revitalize the FBI, which still has a strong nucleus of able agents. L. Patrick Gray III, whom President Nixon has chosen to fill Hoover's shoes, has neither the background nor the ability to do it.

Footnote: The FBI, which still has more than 100 agents searching for the Brody kidnapers, refused all comment on the details of the case.