

OPINION

Bureau of Vituperation

For nearly half a century, under eight Presidents and 16 Attorneys General, J. Edgar Hoover has commanded the Federal Bureau of Investigation with the zeal and jealous authority of a Chinese war lord, protecting the U.S. against enemies within and his agency's turf against all meddling from without. Today, at 75, Hoover directs an army of more than 7,000 agents—with an extra 1,000 reinforcements on the way, authorized this year by Congress.

Insecurity ought to be the least of Hoover's problems. Yet he can be painfully thin-skinned. Last month, 15 FBI agents dropped out of their courses at New York's John Jay College of Criminal Justice because a professor made a critical remark about Hoover. Two weeks later, the Bureau ordered eleven more FBI employees to withdraw from a class at the American University in Washington, D.C.—again because the professor had disparaged Hoover's leadership.* (The professor later apologized, and five of the FBI students returned.)

Last week Hoover came in for some insults that, he decided, demanded his personal attention. In a new book called *Crime in America* (see BOOKS), former Attorney General Ramsey Clark claimed, among other things, that Hoover ran the FBI with a "self-centered concern for his own reputation" and preferred archaic Red-hunting to effective war on organized crime.

A Jellyfish. Hoover was sufficiently annoyed to grant the *Washington Post's* Ken Clawson a rare and lengthy personal interview in his mahogany-walled bastion. Clark said Hoover, "was like a jellyfish . . . a softie," and "even worse than Bobby Kennedy. You never knew which way he was going to flop on an issue." By contrast, said Hoover, Ramsey's dad, former Attorney General and Supreme Court Justice Tom Clark, was "a good strong man." The best of all, however, is Attorney General John Mitchell—"an honest, sincere and very human man."

Observed Ramsey Clark next day: "Mr. Hoover has never been very tolerant of criticism." At the same time, he announced the formation of a Committee for Public Justice, a group of legal experts, writers, scientists and others concerned that the nation has entered "a period of political repression." His father had the last word. Questioned about the crossfire, Tom Clark, 71, said of Hoover: "He's been there 45 years and built a very distinguished and effective bureau. We're both getting pretty old. That's why I retired."

* Humorist Art Buchwald spotted the implications of the trend. It is all part of a widespread conspiracy among university professors, Buchwald wrote in his syndicated column. Knowing that the FBI has planted undercover agents among student radicals, the professors are furiously criticizing Hoover in lectures, then watching to see which shoeless, bearded long-hairs stomp out of the class in protest.