

Hoover, in Unusual Letter, Defends F. B. I. Operations

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By ROBERT M. SMITH

J. Edgar Hoover has made a rare defense of the Federal Bureau of Investigation to a group of lawyers, scholars and journalists who will hold a conference on the F.B.I. later this month.

Mr. Hoover, the bureau director, sent a 10-page letter to Duane Lockard, chairman of the politics department of Princeton University, who is one of the chairmen of the conference. In it, he turned down Dr. Lockard's invitation to attend the

conference or send a representative, but devoted eight typewritten pages to a defense of the bureau as an efficient, fair law enforcement agency.

In view of the criticism that the 76-year-old Mr. Hoover has recently had to face, and the infrequency with which he defends himself, those familiar with the operation of the bureau saw the letter as an unusual document.

Letter Is Unavailable

In the last paragraph of his letter, Mr. Hoover wrote that if information such as he had provided was taken into account at the conference, he believed that, while some criticism of the bureau might be justified, any "verdict" pronounced on it would have to be an "acquittal."

In addition, Mr. Hoover told Dr. Lockard that, if the conference wanted to know how the bureau was regarded, it should poll United States Attorneys, Federal judges and magistrates, and Congressmen. He maintained that the judicial branch and Congress, individually and collectively, provided ample review of the bureau's performance.

Asked for a copy of the letter, a spokesman for the bureau said that it belonged to those to whom it was addressed and referred questions to them.

Dr. Lockard said that he had received the letter as a representative of the conference, which is sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton and the Committee for Public Justice.

He and others on the committee decided last night not to release the contents of the letters now. One of the chair-

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men, Burke Marshall, deputy dean of the Yale Law School, said that it would be "inappropriate" to release to the press a letter meant for participants in the conference. The conference will be held at Princeton Oct. 29 and 30.

It was learned, however, that Mr. Hoover began his letter by thanking Dr. Lockard for the invitation to the conference. He said he would be unable either to attend the meeting or send a representative. In the course of the letter he gave two reasons.

Mr. Hoover pointed out that people associated with the conference—he did not name them—had already said critical things about the bureau so that he had doubts about the conference's impartiality.

Former Attorney General Ramsey Clark a member of the Committee for Public Justice, has said that the bureau suffers from "a lack of objectivity in pursuing facts and an intolerance of internal criticism."

The committee was formed last November as an organization of private citizens concerned that the nation had entered "a period of political repression."

Mr. Hoover wrote that if the bureau responded ever time it was attacked, it would not have time to go about its normal business.

Some Recent Criticism

In recent months, Representative Hale Boggs, Democrat of Louisiana, has charged that the F.B.I. tapped the telephones of congressmen, Senator George McGovern of South Dakota, has accused Mr. Hoover of attempting to destroy the career of an airline pilot who had been critical of the bureau's handling of a hijacking, and Senator Edmund S. Muskie, Democrat of

Maine, has contended that the bureau conducted widespread surveillance at Earth Day last year.

Last week it was disclosed that Mr. Hoover severed direct ties with the Central Intelligence Agency, a year and a half ago because of a disagreement with the agency.

While the bureau has denied almost all the charges against it, Mr. Hoover has not answered them personally.

In his letter, Mr. Hoover conceded that the bureau has made errors, but he defended its overall record as both efficient and even-handed. Among other accomplishments, he listed the training of thousands of policemen from all over the country at the F.B.I. National Academy and the Achievements of the bureau laboratory.

Mr. Hoover took note of the criticism that a puritanical standard of morality was enforced for bureau personnel, but contended that if the director of a tax-supported institution was going to err, it was better to err by being too strict than too lax.

The letter also contained a one-paragraph reference to the bureau's wiretapping activities. Mr. Hoover maintained that over the years wiretapping had been carried out only with the consent of the Attorneys General.

Mr. Hoover suggested that, in the interest of fairness, the conference invite a representative of the Society of Former Special Agents of the F.B.I.

Stephen Gillers, director of the Committee for Public Justice, said that the conference chairmen were drafting a reply that would accept the suggestion, assert their objectivity and ask Mr. Hoover to reconsider and send a representative.

Mr. Gillers said the conference "is intended to be a scholarly inquiry into the structure, role and powers of the bureau in American society."