

Thirty Years *Post 11/16/64*

Unaccustomed as he is to public criticism, J. Edgar Hoover customarily responds to its occasional expression by impugning the integrity, virtue or patriotism of his critics. Thus, it was quite characteristic of him to denounce Dr. Martin Luther King (who had presumed to question the FBI's effectiveness respecting civil liberties in the South) as "the most notorious liar in the country." It was equally characteristic of him to call the Warren Commission "unfair and unjust" because it had gently chided the FBI for its role in relation to Lee Harvey Oswald and to refer to eminent judges, including members of the Supreme Court as "bleeding hearts" because they took a different view from his own in interpreting certain clauses of the Bill of Rights.

This kind of talk, if it came from any other bureau chief in any other department of the Federal Government, would be generally recognized as insufferable effrontery on the part of a public servant. It is no less than that though it comes from the Director of the FBI. In the same interview, Mr. Hoover let it be known, as he has done with equal candor in the past, that the FBI is tapping something like 80 telephones continuously and is using information obtained from this wire-tapping in connection with counter-intelligence activities. There is no question that his purposes are patriotic. But there is no question, either, that he is violating an act of Congress.

Mr. Hoover is a subordinate official of the Department of Justice. The Attorney General must, therefore, accept responsibility for Mr. Hoover's extravagant talk and for his extra-legal action. It is time for the Attorney General to exercise authority over a Bureau which has for far too long been run by Mr. Hoover as though it were a sovereign principality.

Mr. Hoover has held his office for 30 years. He has discharged his duties with probity, efficiency and the highest dedication to his country. His record is an admirable one, and Americans owe him great gratitude. But that gratitude cannot properly be expressed by allowing him to abuse his authority. That authority, by reason of its nature and its impact on civil liberty, must be forever subject to restraint. Unhappily, Mr. Hoover has now demonstrated that he has been in office too long. His retirement, when he reaches retirement age on his 70th birthday, would be a contribution to his own high repute and to the welfare of the Bureau he has done so much to develop.