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Background

Letter Cost FBI Agent His Job

Sen. George S. McGovern (D., S. D.) has called for public hearing on the circumstances leading to the resignation of Special Agent John F. Shaw from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Shaw's resignation "with prejudice" came after he wrote a letter to a college professor about the FBI. Following are excerpts from the letter:

Basically the Bureau pulse-beat is transmitted coast-to-coast through 55 geographically spaced field offices which operate as partially autonomous cells. A Special Agent in Charge (SAC) is technically in command at each of these 55 locations. Actually, a SAC is not generally known for his independence of action or his propensity for original thought.

He is probably best recognized as a "sounding-board" for the Director's policies, thoughts, and directions and as a "competent administrator" in the daily routine of his office. Operational control of the FBI is centralized in Washington, D. C.

How centralized is this control? Well, woe to the Special Agent in Charge (SAC) in Indianapolis, Butte, Buffalo, or San Francisco if some "independent" remark or prepared press-release is later construed by Headquarters as out-of-line with "established Bureau policy."

Washington is always in the enviable position of placing its own interpretation on all communications and information it receives from its field offices. Washington weighs, evaluates and passes judgment on the results of investigation submitted; and effectively assumes the role of "Monday morning quarterback."

Thus in the Lee Harvey Oswald case, the Bureau publicly refused to accept any blame in the handling of its investigation of Oswald; but after the Dallas debacle had generally lost front-page news coverage, the Bureau censured, suspended and transferred the Special Agent to whom the Oswald case had been assigned.

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One effect of the Bureau's promoting



The Ten Most-Wanted by the FBI

its image so vociferously through publicity is the acquired characteristic of "over-caution." I believe it is possible for an organization to become so conscious of its public image—its unsullied reputation—that is is actually reduced in its effectiveness. At a time when the entire governmental "establishment" is under assault, the Bureau of course is even more sensitive to criticism from any quarter.

This brings me to the question of "Public Relations" which is an integral part of the FBI as it is of any modern corporation with a product to sell or a service to provide to the public. The Bureau obviously depends on strong public cooperation for success in its investigations.

Whether its public relations program is excessive—and to what degree—is a question open to some debate. I would argue for continued good publicity, responsive to current needs, and based on current noteworthy accomplishments. But dispense with the unin-

spired stream of gangster stories that relate back to the roaring 20's and 30's.

Through dogged repetition the Bureau sometimes creates the impression—inadvertently—that it has done nothing particularly worthwhile since Hoover personally disarmed Alvin Karpis in 1932.

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The Bureau is always in the path of criticism because of the sensitive nature of its responsibilities. In recent years, Washington columnists have raised speculation about "dangerous, extraneous information" in the secret files of the FBI accumulated in the course of its investigations, but not strictly germane to those investigations. You, yourself, mentioned "personal dossiers" compiled by the FBI on political figures in Washington, D. C. circles; possibly on every congressman on Capitol Hill. Not to minimize the inherent danger of such files, if they exist, but their compilation presumably on a continuous basis would require a massive amount of manpower that might just exceed the manning level of the FBI. I seriously question whether so much information of the "little black-book" variety is either "on deposit" or is being maintained for the express purpose of political black-mail.

In the hands of an unscrupulous person, practically any sensitive information uncovered in the course of an FBI investigation might serve some sinister

purpose. But such has simply not been the proven case in the Bureau's history. Periodic wild speculation in this area has not built a conclusive case against the FBI, nor raised the imputation of wrongdoing in our regard convincingly.

Whatever faults may be attributed to Hoover, whatever criticism can be attached to his tenure as Director, however much displeasure (hate) his longevity may arouse, it is still quite a task to impugn his character and integrity on defensible grounds. Personal idiosyncrasies, perhaps.

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How does one merit promotional consideration within a paramilitary system professedly based on merit? Well, there are lots of ways. Requesting a "personal interview" with Mr. Hoover, however, is probably the most frequently used avenue to advancement. Within the allotted few minutes of time, apparently countless Bureau executives today were able to impress "the man" with their latent leadership capabilities.

I cannot draw on personal experience in this area, but from "reliable sources" I am led to believe that the personal interview with Mr. Hoover runs as follows: 1) Preliminary greeting and handshake 2) the agent expressing his desire for promotional consideration (previously cleared in writing for an appointment) 3) a brief "sounding out" and shop-talk about current cases of national interest 4) posing for the official full-profile, colored photograph and 5) farewell handshake.

Within this brief period (reportedly timed by stop-watch buffs between 3 to 5 minutes) the Director passes on

the merit of the candidate and jots his cryptic analysis on a memo attached to the government personnel file.

There are no statistics available on how many of the current Bureau hierarchy were catapulted onto the promotional ladder by the formula described above. Speculation is that a considerable number were.

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In due respect to Hoover it is accurate to state that the record of the Bureau prior to 1924 was not an enviable one. Internal corruption was a matter of national disgrace. Hoover was instrumental in establishing, then in gradually expanding the role of a select, disciplined, and comparatively well-trained body of investigators.

Gradually, the Bureau's responsibilities have been expanded to the breadth and scope we recognize today.

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This brings us once again to the person of Mr. Hoover. It is practically impossible to divorce him from any academic discussion of the Bureau, particularly Bureau administration.

I believe that many critics just don't possess enough material facts about Bureau policies to criticize them effectively or argue intelligently; and thus resort to invective or vilification.

Cliches abound in arguments for and against the FBI and inevitably "open" discussion leads to an exchange of snide remarks.

Whether justified or not, the Director also seems to have the House Subcommittee on Appropriations in his hip pocket, and this body technically controls the fiscal life-line of the FBI.