

J. Edgar Hoover, You Have a Friend

By Marvin Kinman

"Should J. Edgar Hoover Be Replaced?" was the question put before the public on a recent episode of "The Advocates," one of public broadcastings' more exciting shows. The answer, according to the latest count in the viewer poll that followed these rhetorical TV questions, was a resounding NO.

Speaking in defense of the FBI director was Ephem Zimballist Jr., the star of "The FBI" on ABC. There is a certain logic in such a choice of an advocate—especially if you believe in the "art-follows-life-follows-art" theory which somebody must have thought of while looking in those barbershop mirrors.

On a question such as "Was World War II necessary?" John Wayne could be the advocate on the

ground that he won half of the war in the movies (Ettoll Flynn won the other half, but he's dead). Carried a step further, great historical figures from the entertainment world such as Don Ameche could testify at hearings on phone company applications for rate increases, or go before the Supreme Court to argue for the constitutionality of wiretapping.

There is no truth in the scurrilous rumor that Zimballist was the only Hollywood figure willing to put in a good word for Hoover in public. I'm sure Red Skelton was also available.

The advocate for Hoover testified that he was on the show as a concerned private citizen, who knows a little about the way the FBI works, and anyway this is no time to attack one of our strongest institutions. The

Television

"The FBI" may have been overly modest. If anything, I consider him an overly concerned private citizen.

More than the rest of us, Zimballist has a financial interest in the continuation of the status quo at the Bureau. A new director might consider it a violation of security procedures to open their files to a television company. But I guess Zimballist would be able to carry on with some show anyway under another name. The Wildlife and Game Conservation Bureau has some exciting stories to tell. There probably aren't more than a handful of people in this country — paid informers and the like—who have such a potential conflict of inter-

est as Zimballist did on "The Advocates."

Mr. FBI wasn't being criticized, of course; Hoover was. And his advocate certainly had a winning way with the public television audience, which is usually assumed to be made up of eggheads. I never knew how popular Hoover was with his constituency.

Of the more than 20,000 who had voted—as of last week—the sentiment was running better than 2 to 1 to retain the director. One of the more interesting letters to arrive at "The Advocates" headquarters in Boston (at station WGBH) was one from J. Edgar Hoover. In his opinion, "the show was excellent."

The temptation is to suggest that FBI agents in places like Butte, Mont., did all the voting. It would be disappointing to learn that

Hoover couldn't win an election in the FBI. Another theory is that conservatives tend to write letters more easily than liberals. However, the vote may only mean that Hoover is truly a very popular man, as his supporters have been telling us all along.

My own reaction to the debate was, why bother to write a letter? The man won't last forever. He'll reach the age of 95 and step down.

Television viewers will know before newspaper readers when that day is imminent. Hoover's name is never mentioned on Ephem Zimballist's "The FBI", Hoover, who reads the scripts, doesn't allow it. The first time he is mentioned, it may be the first sign that J. Edgar Hoover is no longer connected with the FBI.