

FBI's Authority

By DAVID LAWRENCE

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WASHINGTON — The passing of J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation for the last 48 years, should not mean any lessening of the authority given the bureau or a change in its functions.

Back in 1924, when Mr. Hoover was made head of the FBI by President Coolidge upon the recommendation of Attorney General Harlan F. Stone, the investigative arm of the Department of Justice had fallen into disrepute. It had come to be regarded as entangled in politics, with patronage playing a large part in the appointment of its personnel. There were widespread charges of corruption.

J. Edgar Hoover took over the job of reorganization and soon developed an effective unit that served not only the Department of Justice and the President but other executive agencies as well.

He had a deep sense of loyalty to the government and was in no sense a political partisan. He has maintained the same cooperation with both Republican and Democratic administrations.

Over the years the FBI has worked with local police and law-enforcement bodies, and it has operated efficiently to collect information that has often been used to solve crimes promptly.

Much of the data obtained by the FBI have been made available to other departments of the government and transmitted

to the central intelligence agency. This has been of help in dealing with plots of an international nature which have been hatched to hurt this country and friendly nations abroad.

J. Edgar Hoover's chief skill was his ability to engender a spirit of fidelity among his men not to any political party but to the government of the United States.

His associates know a great deal about criminal activities and underground warfare, but Mr. Hoover himself has been the one to direct what should be done with the information gathered and how far investigations should be pressed.

His judgment has been followed throughout the years. His colleagues may have at times disagreed with him, but they have not always known all the circumstances that have required the government to refrain from taking action at a particular time and to await further developments or to transmit the information to a state or city and depend upon them to move in the case.

Sometimes an FBI message has been responsible for an important step being taken by a foreign government because it has been made aware of something which has been happening that threatened its own safety.

On the whole, the Hoover administration of the FBI has

been constructive and useful. The critics, of course, have concentrated on the usual assumptions that the FBI has prejudices against certain types of organizations or has overstepped its authority. They do not take into account the facts about persons who are responsible for certain activities, many of whom are actually engaged in conspiracies to damage their own country.

J. Edgar Hoover has always deferred to the wishes of the president and the attorney general after submitting the information that has been gathered. The duty of the FBI, Mr. Hoover felt, is to furnish the data and let the Department of Justice determine whether there shall be a prosecution.

Over the years, some of the exposures have covered instances in which individuals either have betrayed their own government or have stolen documents or otherwise sought to embarrass it.

The FBI has played the part merely of providing information, leaving it to the administration to decide what shall be done with it. But again and again, the critics have attacked the FBI. Mr. Hoover has refused to give details of the bureau's work except when evidence is presented in court.

Over all, the FBI has done a constructive job in defense of its government, and J. Edgar Hoover's record has been appreciated by every president during the 48 years the director has been in charge of the organization.

The American government has lost one of its most valuable employes — a man who has served unflinchingly and unselfishly for nearly a half century despite criticism from groups which were investigated or which wanted to see the bureau's work curbed.

The last three Presidents have said Mr. Hoover could stay on until he wished to retire. He died while in office, so it can be said he retired peacefully this week at the age of 77.

J. Edgar Hoover goes down in history as the greatest investigator of crime and of law violations the nation has ever had.



FBI
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By JACK ANDERSON

WASHINGTON — J. Edgar Hoover died, as he would have wished, in harness.

When he took over the FBI 48 years ago, it was loaded with hacks, misfits, drunks and courthouse hangers-on. In a remarkably brief time, he transformed it into a close-knit, effective organization with an "esprit de corps" exceeding that of the Marines.

Under Hoover's reign, agents were fired for drunkenness, for insubordination, even a few for homosexual behavior. But not a single FBI man ever tried to fix a case, defraud the taxpayers or sell out his country.

This amazing, scandal-free record was accomplished by hiring the best men available, training them well, convincing them they were the best, paying them top salaries, and then selling the public on the idea that the FBI is ready to protect the nation from internal emergency.

Above all, Hoover insisted upon discipline. FBI men, who were able to face down armed criminals, couldn't escape the gaze of Hoover. Small disciplinary infractions brought heavy punishment — transfers to unpleasant posts, suspension without pay, or outright dismissal.

For his giant accomplishments, the nation should pay homage to the Old Bulldog whose grim visage, gruff manner and steel-trap mind won't soon be forgotten.

But we would be hypocritical if we didn't also make note of the FBI's excesses under Hoover. Before he took over the Bureau in 1924, it was used openly for political purposes. He largely halted this abuse.

With characteristic discretion, however, he made information from FBI files available to the right people. And, from time to time, the FBI acted as a political police force.

From the FBI's confidential files, we have obtained dozens of dossiers that have been kept on prominent Americans. It is clear from these documents that FBI agents have spent an extraordinary amount of their

time snooping into the private lives of movie stars, sports heroes, political figures and other public personalities.

Hoover also used the FBI to investigate the slightest criticism. For example, the main entry in the secret FBI dossier on the Rev. Walter Fauntroy, the nonvoting representative for the District of Columbia in Congress is an account of a press conference he called to criticize Hoover.

Fauntroy met the press on January 6, 1971, at the site of the new FBI building. Declares a confidential report in Fauntroy's file:

"At 1:10 p.m., Reverend Fauntroy was observed by Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation exiting from a car bearing a 'Fauntroy For Congress' poster on the left front door.

"Reverend Fauntroy approached the construction site and after greeting newsmen began to read from a prepared statement, the opening paragraph of which inferred that the new (building) was being constructed as a shrine for Mr. J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI....

"In his statement, Reverend Fauntroy was critical of Attorney General John N. Mitchell and J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI, both of whom were described by Reverend Fauntroy as discriminating against minority groups in hiring employees...."

It is questionable whether FBI agents, in these days of rising crime, should be spared to investigate public figures and to monitor the press conference of congressmen.

Nevertheless, J. Edgar Hoover, now beyond the judgments of those of us who sometimes criticized him, is entitled to the final measure of praise now being paid to him.

But it should not be forgotten, amid all the tributes, that the FBI has been guilty of excesses. These abuses of power should occupy President Nixon in his search for Hoover's successor.