

J. Edgar Hoover—An Assessment

By Jack Anderson

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 man-

ner 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 non-voting 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 conferences 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.

Intelligence Briefs

• South Vietnamese planes have been dumping leaflets

like autumn leaves on the attacking North Vietnamese troops. The leaflets show President Nixon posing happily with Chinese Premier Chou En-lai. The message claims that the Chinese have already sold out Hanoi, that the terms have already been agreed upon in Peking and, therefore, that the North Vietnamese are risking their lives for nothing.

• The prospects of a joint Soviet-American space flight have improved. Russian and American space scientists, conferring in Moscow, agreed to try to persuade their governments to approve a joint expedition into space.