

A PERSON WITH national standing, known for high probity and broadly acceptable to both Republicans and Democrats, with experience in the law but no present connection to any particular law enforcement agency.

Those are the specifications for the replacement of J. Edgar Hoover as director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. And the designation of assistant Attorney Gen. Patrick Gray as acting director only postpones for a little while the urgent need to make the right choice.

For the bureau performs one of the most sensitive functions in American life. It has recently experienced serious trouble. And the rot needs to be arrested before it affects even more vital parts of government.

Friends and foes of the bureau both agree on the sensitivity of its mission. The FBI is the foremost symbol of law enforcement in the country—the touchstone of public confidence in police everywhere.

THE BUREAU IS also the principal national agency for protection against foreign espionage and sabotage. It commands what is probably the broadest net of informers anywhere in history. It has special responsibility for many of the most visible crimes—notably kidnapping and assassination. It operates the best crime laboratories and criminal information systems. It has—or what comes to the same thing, is believed to have—detailed information on many persons of prominence and power.

The recent decline of the bureau is not much less in dispute. The price of Mr. Hoover's long tenure was that many of his most able assistant directors—Quinn Tamm, Courtney Evans, Alan Belmont, Cartha de Loach, William Sullivan—left or were forced out. Those who remained tended to be time-servers and yes-men, comfortable with what Mr. Sullivan recently called "fossilized bureaucratic traditions and obsolete policies."

Not surprisingly, the bureau did not keep fully abreast of the rapidly changing American scene.

HASTE TO CATCH up on organized crime in the Kennedy years led to wholesale bugging and wiretapping which inevitably became known. Haste to catch up on the antiwar groups in the Nixon years yielded bungled attempts at penetration which also became known. In consequence, the bureau came under attack—and, what was worse, ridicule—in the Congress and the media.

Local police forces naturally came to rely less and less on the bureau in meeting their changing problems. The current trend in most of the big cities' police departments is toward minimizing casual street crime through cooperation with local neighborhoods. This local focus on limiting every-day offenses runs against the bureau's emphasis on the solution of big cases through advanced investigative techniques.

Not a few of the big city departments are dissatisfied with the information and services they receive from the FBI. Partly in response to their pressures, there now has been set up the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration—an undoubted rival to the bureau as the prime law enforcement agency at the federal level.

WITH ALL THESE unfavorable currents running in the outside world, morale inside the FBI has slumped badly. Recent accounts depict a tangle of rival cliques held together only by fear of Mr. Hoover. It seems a short step to the point where warring factions try to advance their own interests by hawking about secret information to the political powers—a truly damaging condition.

The first requirement of the new director is that he stop the decline. That means imposing the fear of something besides Mr. Hoover on the bureau itself.

Shaping up the bureau, however, is not going to be possible unless political leaders in the administration and the Congress give the new director their confidence. That is why naming a figure with broad appeal in both the Democratic and Republican parties is essential. The more so since law and

order, civil rights, and dissent have become such sensitive political issues.

EXPERIENCE IN LAW enforcement is equally important to the task of truly running the FBI.

As an added bonus, a director with legal training would presumably be sensitive to the libertarian considerations that should enter into the Bureau's work. But if only because there is so much in-fighting in the FBI and so much tension between the bureau and the major city police departments, the next director should not have close recent connections with the bureau itself or any particular police department.

No doubt it will be hard to find the right person. But not impossible.

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Filling Hoover's Job