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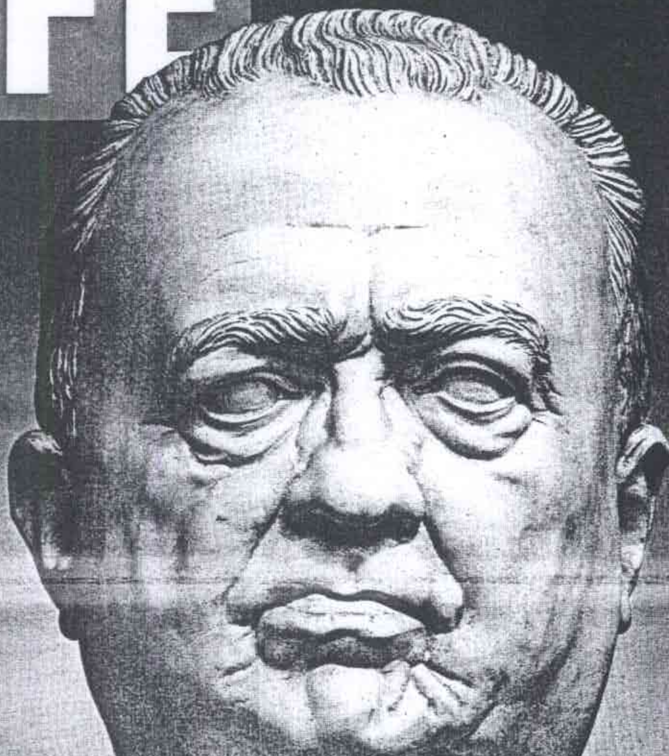

The 47-year reign of J. Edgar Hoover

EMPEROR OF THE FBI

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A sight to freeze the blood of many a public enemy—J. Edgar Hoover looking down the sights.

After almost half a century in total and imperious charge

G-Man under fire

When J. Edgar Hoover became head of the Justice Department's Division of Investigation in 1924, Bonnie had not met Clyde. Charles Lindbergh, 22, was wing-walking above county fairs, and Richard Nixon, 11, was sweeping up in the family store. Red Grange was stupefying tacklers for the University of Illinois, and John Dillinger began serving his first term in the pen. All of which is to suggest that a lot of thumbprints have been rolled across God's inkpad in the intervening decades, and that J. Edgar Hoover, his memory banked with the legions of liars, whippersnappers and "Public Rats" he has bested, remains locked in charge right where he was. Among the most ardently supported public figures in U.S. history, he is at 76 his own best monument to fierce pride, marble stubbornness, bureaucratic cunning, unflagging vigilance for both his ego and his ends, an energy approaching rage, and the sturdy guts to stand his ground against the pack.

The familiar case for Mr. Hoover's retirement —that he has been in office too long and that he is obsessed with preserving his own status somewhere just this side of Olympus—has for years been carried by an assortment of largely powerless onlookers. But the thrust of the criticism appears to be changing, and Mr. Hoover has drawn the attention of more powerful critics. Now he has been challenged—of all places—on the floor of the House. It has been widely charged that the Director's imperious disregard for any but his own views of the national interest diminishes his Bureau's effectiveness and has even become a serious infringement on civil rights. His public allegations about criminal matters before charges have been brought, his recently revealed preoccupation with the surveillance of student groups as a "threat to the nation's stability and security," and his increasingly harsh responses to criticism of any kind have put his leadership and his agency's function under serious question. And at times his behavior has infuriated and embarrassed high officials in the Nixon administration.

When Shirley Temple came to call in 1937, Hoover wore the special badge of *her* make-believe police force on his lapel and signed her autograph book.

Hoover expected his agents to dress impeccably and stay in top condition. At Miami Beach he kept himself in great shape at 43 by playing tennis.

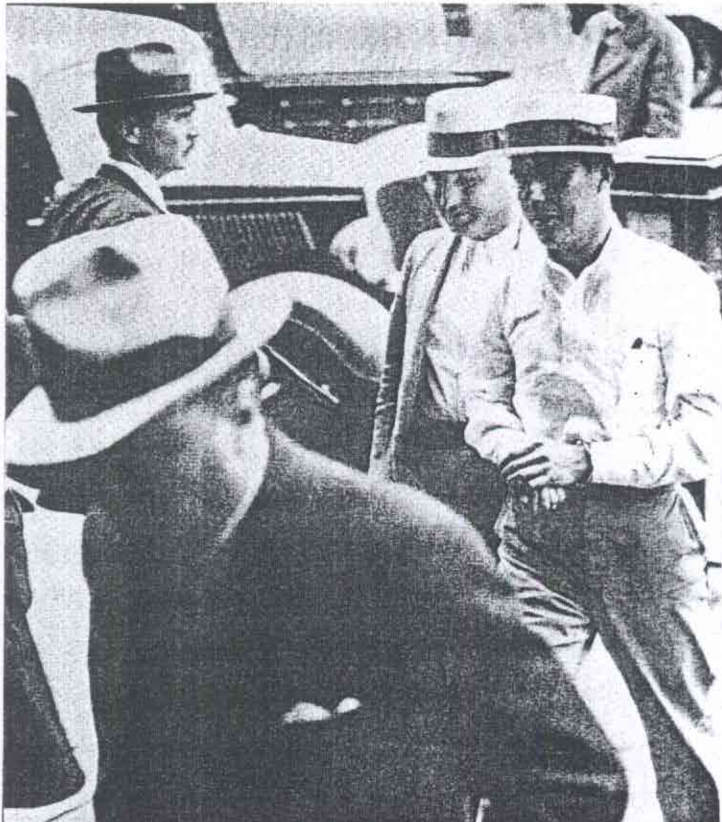
The Director and his best friend and semiretired top assistant, Clyde Tolson, took a vacation ride on the boardwalk in Atlantic City in 1938.

The many faces that made the Hoover image

The Hoover image—implacable pursuer of the lawless, alert guardian against godless ideology, wise and trusted friend of Presidents, jovial pal of children and dogs, sports fan and horse follower—makes the man hard to find. There can be no doubt that man and image combined to produce an investigative force of great efficiency, excellence and incorruptibility. Or that J. Edgar Hoover gave his job and his country an undivided loyalty. Yet he seems most endangered now by his apparently hardening belief in his own omniscient image. His disclosure to an open Senate hearing about an alleged plot to destroy Washington utilities and kidnap a high government official had an air of calculated arrogance about it that made it worse than simply a premature and improper assault against the priests Philip and Daniel Berrigan.

The FBI's interest—Hoover's interest—in broad surveillance also seems to be growing. Documents stolen last month from the FBI office in Media, Pa. disclose that agents are now being urged to harass dissenters in order to cause them to become informers. Increasing the numbers of "interviews" with such people, one of the stolen papers suggests, "will enhance the paranoia endemic in these circles and will further serve to get across the point that there is an FBI agent behind every mailbox."

The Director's growing intolerance of criticism has fed talk even inside the government about the need for a successor. His characterization of former Attorney General Ramsey Clark as a "jellyfish" was as blunt as his treatment of an agent he considers disloyal (page 42). One longtime FBI agent speaks of his ex-boss sadly: "The old man's getting childish," he says. "He's old and he should get out. He was good for law enforcement. He'll never retire. He doesn't have any interests. He has no family. What does a fellow do? You get tired of going to the races."



The Director's favorite New York night spot was the Stork Club, and there he was toasted on his New Year's 44th birthday by a group of friends including actress Lupe Velez.

The Director chats in 1939 with infant godson, J. Edgar Nichols, as the parents, Mr. and Mrs. Louis B. Nichols (he was Hoover's assistant), look on.

The Director sometimes took personal part in collaring public enemies, and he led Alvin Karpis (center, below) to court after arrest in 1936.

Ch. J. Edgar Hoover, who has two dogs of his own, helped promote a Washington dog show in 1954 by matching prominent jaws with boxer Ch. Holly Spring of Ballerina.

Hoover stuck his hands up (below) on Junior G-Man command from members of a local boys' club who were delighted to capture the Director.

Unwanted: any criticism from within the ranks

The mistake that cost Special Agent Jack Shaw his career was to put down his feelings about the FBI and its Director—praise as well as criticism—in a personal letter last September. Shaw, 37 and in his eighth year with the Bureau, was attached to the New York field office and, along with 15 other selected agents, was also taking graduate courses at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. He drafted the letter to one of his professors, he says, because he wanted to "argue with coherence" over some remarks about the Bureau the professor had made in class. In his letter Shaw defended the FBI as "efficient" and undeserving of any "Gestapo-like" charges. He defended J. Edgar Hoover as a man of character and integrity whose "reputation has been exposed to, and has survived well, the poisoned pens of the sharpest critics." But he also criticized the Bureau on many counts: a rigid and overcautious bureaucracy that blunts personal initiative and aggressive action. A "sledgehammer" approach to public image-building. Too much emphasis on catching "dime-a-dozen" bank robbers, not enough on fighting organized crime. And the personality-cult atmosphere typified, Shaw wrote, "by a haunting phrase that echoes throughout the Bureau: 'Do not embarrass the Director.' "

Former Special Agent Jack Shaw

Shaw closed his letter with a request that it remain completely confidential. "Otherwise," he predicted, "I shall be obliged to begin preparing my defense before some governmental court of inquisition." Ironically, the inquisition began even before the letter could be sent. It started, Shaw told LIFE Correspondent Margery Byers, with a "feverish" late-afternoon phone call from a fellow agent. "Jack, all hell's broken loose. Did you write a letter?" Shaw, naïvely it turns out, had given his draft to a girl in the FBI office pool for typing. Instead of her own typewriter, she used a large new experimental model with a "memory" which produced a clean final version of corrected rough copy. An agent, peeking casually over the girl's shoulder, read a sentence or two of the letter as the machine printed it out. Soon he and other agents were thrashing through office wastebaskets searching for discarded fragments. They found eight. At first Shaw's fellow agents discussed his indiscretion among themselves—but not with him. Then they took the matter to a senior agent.

Informed of the uproar, Shaw went to the special agent in charge of administration. "There was no informal discussion," he recalls. "He began meticulously to write down everything I said. I told him to stop writing, that we were talking about a life and a career."

Next Shaw was confronted by the agent in charge of the New York office. The letter was FBI property, he said. Shaw disagreed: "I wrote it as a graduate student, not as an agent." Turn over the letter to us, insisted the chief agent. "Let me sleep on that," answered Shaw. "Sleep well, Mr. Shaw," said the chief. "Sleep well."

Next day the interrogation of Special Agent Shaw continued. Three agents took turns questioning him, two at a time. "They hit me with everything but their fists," he says. "There was no gentlemanliness. It was a series of broadsides. There was no question of fair play. It really got them that an agent whose loyalty had never been questioned, whose Bureau record was impeccable, should say these things."

Shaw still refused to turn over the letter, though he remembers signing a statement (he was not given a copy) that he felt the professor's remarks were well within the area of academic freedom and that he had answered the comments with fairness and logic. At the day's end an agent who had "found" parts of the letter looked in on Shaw and said, "The only thing I can say is I'm really sorry—and have a good weekend."

Shaw has not had many good weekends, or weekdays, since. Director Hoover, accusing him by telegram of "atrocious judgment," ordered Shaw transferred to Butte, Mont.—a purgatory post. Shaw, whose wife May was seriously ill (she died on March 24), resigned instead. Hoover accepted the resignation "with prejudice," a phrase of damnation that has so far made it impossible for Shaw to find a new job in security or law enforcement.

Job-hunting now in Baltimore, Shaw remains a critic of the Bureau and its boss—but a moderate one. "We've got some damn fine agents, but a lot we're not using. And a hell of a big turnover. It's time the agent had some rights. He should be protected against capriciousness when he gets in a jam.

"Very few of the good men go to the top. The easiest way to rise is through sycophancy. Agents don't criticize or dissent—even at an office conference." According to Shaw, the Bureau habitually backs off from "sensitive" investigations—ones that could cause political or public embarrassment. "The easiest way to get a case resolved," he says, "is to bring it to the point of a sensitive interview, then close it. That's the problem—we never get beyond the sensitive areas.

"We've got to have an FBI," Shaw believes, "but let's meet our responsibilities to society and get away from the personality cult. It colors every investigation to suit the image of Mr. Hoover. I think he's trying to establish a legend as the greatest living American. He's a good bureaucrat, but he's not the savior of the country. Let him rest on his laurels."

Benjamin Hoskins Paddock, convicted bank robber and confidence man, sought as a federal prison escapee.

Cameron David Bishop, a former student at Colorado State University, sought for dynamiting power lines.

Hubert Geroid (H. Rap) Brown, wanted for inciting to riot and arson in 1967 Maryland demonstrations.

David Fine, student at the University of Wisconsin, charged in 1970 bombing of its mathematics center.

Byron James Rice, wanted for murder of an armored-car guard during 1966 robbery in California.

John William Clouser, escaped from the mental ward of a Florida hospital, sought for interstate auto theft.

Marie Dean Arrington, convicted murderer, sought by the FBI after her escape from a Florida prison in 1969.

Charles Lee Herron, sought for interstate flight to avoid prosecution for the murder of a Nashville policeman.

Most Wanted: 16 now on the list

Most people equate FBI diligence with the Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list—a conception that surely pleases the FBI in its effort to maintain a tidy and well-publicized record of criminals sought and apprehended. But the FBI hasn't always employed this technique. In the days of Capone and Dillinger, the Bureau issued "identification orders" on all fugitives it considered important, tipping off the press on whom it was *most* anxious to nab. Popular titles like "Public Enemy No. 1" were the result. In the late '40s, features on notorious criminals were a staple of the wire services. International News Service coined the phrase "Ten Most Wanted Fugitives" in 1950, and in March of that year the FBI adopted the idea and made it official. Ever since, there has been a list, amended periodically, of the 10 persons the FBI was seeking with the greatest passion, complete with fingerprints, pictures, description of the suspect and his crimes.

Though the requirements for making the list have remained the same—a current serious criminal charge, the fugitive's criminal history and potential as a menace to society, usefulness of national-publicity in apprehending him—the character of the list has changed. Ordinary everyday bank robbers and murderers—long the mainstays of the list—have been joined by a number of younger fugitives, many of them political activists who have been charged with a variety of crimes, from murder to mob action to destruction of government property. The newcomers have swelled the FBI's famous "Top Ten" to a sweet 16.

Bernardine Rae Dohrn, Weatherman, wanted for violating anti-riot law during Chicago's 1969 "Days of Rage."

Susan Saxe, Brandeis student, also sought for bank robbery and the murder of a Brighton, Mass. policeman.

Taylor Morris Teaford, wanted for the murder of his 74-year-old grandmother in Madera County, Calif.

Warren David Reddock, a paroled forger, sought for the murder of a Chicago businessman in 1968.

Karleton Lewis Armstrong, former student at Wisconsin, wanted for bombing the mathematics building.

Dwight Alan Armstrong, brother of Karleton, wanted for bombing the mathematics center in Madison, Wis.

Leo Frederick Burt, also wanted for the bombing of the mathematics center at the University of Wisconsin.

Katherine Ann Power, Brandeis University student, sought for bank robbery and murdering a policeman.

Calvin Coolidge (left) was President when 29-year-old Hoover became director of the Division of Investigations in 1924.

Nobody dares

by TOM WICKER

Mr. Wicker, Associate editor of the New York Times, *is a columnist and author of* JFK and LBJ: The Influence of Personality upon Politics.

During President Kennedy's brief tenure, his appointments secretary, Kenneth O'Donnell, also served as his liaison with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. O'Donnell was an old acquaintance of Courtney Evans, the FBI man who kept liaison with the White House. But on the day O'Donnell returned to his office after Kennedy's assassination, another FBI agent named Cartha D. DeLoach appeared and announced that he would replace Mr. Evans. It did not surprise O'Donnell that "Deke" DeLoach turned out to be a friend of the new President, Lyndon B. Johnson.

Nothing unusual about that—not since this small piece of alert bureaucracy was propounded by John Edgar Hoover, the seemingly indestructible survivor of more than four decades in one of the most demanding of all public offices. Yet the small detail of promptly substituting DeLoach for Evans is the sort of thing—duplicated thousands of times—that has been crucial to Hoover's remarkable longevity.

But even a master bureaucrat and a skilled publicist might not have been able to stay in office through eight Presidents and 16 Attorneys General. Something more was needed; J. Edgar Hoover, who in 1924 had taken over a scandal-ridden agency with a mandate to make it honest and effective, was able over the years to impose just the right conditions.

Because of their demanding and dangerous duties and the temptation they would face, he insisted that his agents would have to meet the highest standards and, as a result, would have to be better paid than other government employees. Because of the dangers of corruption, political activity and lack of discipline, he also insisted that the agents could not be granted the ordinary tenure and protection of the civil service system.

Once those conditions were well established, J. Edgar Hoover had administrative power unrivaled in Washington—dictatorial power. Agents now start at more than $11,500 a year, the highest level of any federal workers with comparable education and experience; they nevertheless operate without civil service protection and at the whim and direction of Mr. Hoover, whose discipline is swift, harsh and—if need be—arbitrary. That discipline and the iron control of the FBI that it gives him are the vital underpinnings of Hoover's many bureaucratic and public relations triumphs.

How Hoover's several roles complement and reinforce each other was illustrated in capsule after the assassination of President Kennedy. Publicist Hoover vigorously denied that he or the FBI had been lax in any way, or had failed to cooperate with the Secret Service, and thus pitted his and the agency's vast prestige directly against the temporary standing of the Warren Commission. Meanwhile, administrative czar Hoover censured, suspended and then transferred the agent who had handled the case of Lee Harvey Oswald before the shooting in Dallas; and bureaucrat Hoover hurried Deke DeLoach to the side of his friend, the new President. And from the day Johnson took office, the Director started going directly to the White House over the head of Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who was no better liked by the new President than by J. Edgar Hoover.

By such means, the FBI and its fabled Director often have staved off the kind of public disillusionment that could ruin both; as one result of the moves described above, President Johnson soon exempted J. Edgar Hoover from the federal law for mandatory retirement at age 70.

Hoover has understood the problems of getting and keeping power in Washington better than any other high official of any modern Administration. One important reason is that he has displayed no ambition for higher office (if there is one); like a hard-headed businessman, he has relentlessly plowed his profits back into the firm instead of dispersing them elsewhere. His life has been the FBI that he created; his pride is to have kept it and himself independent and powerful; his genius is that he has known exactly how to do it.

It is the essence of Hoover's achievement that he has never let the chips fall where they may. The FBI, for instance, gave precisely the assistance it was asked to give, and no more, to the Senate labor rackets committee of which Robert Kennedy was chief counsel; the Director knew well the political power of organized labor and he steered as clear of it as he could.

Hoover also faced the fact in the '50s and early '60s that the men who dominated Congress, and thus his budget, were Southerners. So the FBI displayed no more zeal than necessary in civil rights cases (the Bureau's enthusiasm was also dampened by the fact that this required them to investigate the same local law enforcement officials with whom they cooperated closely in other areas); as late as 1964, Lyndon Johnson had to force the Director to open an adequate station in that hotbed of segregation, Jackson, Miss.

Lacking any formal jurisdiction over such activities of organized crime as gambling, narcotics, loan-sharking, extortion and liquor violations, Hoover resisted taking jurisdiction until recent years. He knew that these were the areas of crime in which lawmen themselves were most often corrupted, and he saw no reason to expose his agents, and the reputation of his masterpiece, the FBI, to that sort of temptation. Similarly, one explanation for the notorious lack of cooperation the FBI has given to other law enforcement agencies—the Bureau of Narcotics, for instance, or the "strike forces" against organized crime—is that the Director feared to be tarred with the brush of others' failures or corruption.

The hard-headed businessman also has been a shrewd theatrical agent, choosing the FBI's roles for the best returns in glamour, statistics and public interest. In the '30s, the G-men all but eliminated bank robbing and kidnapping for ransom as crime problems in America. In the '40s, they waged a successful and well-publicized war against Nazi saboteurs and spies. In the '50s, they defended the nation against the threat of internal Communism—although it now seems likely that they did almost as much to create the threat in the public mind as they did to root it out in the courts.

In the '60s, when public interest in organized crime began to grow, Hoover was caught short, for one of the few times in his exemplary casting career; Justice Department and some FBI veterans believe that it was to catch up in this difficult area of law enforcement that the FBI first went wholesale into electronic eavesdropping.

By the end of the '60s, true to form, Hoover had spied student and black radicalism as a target of considerable public wrath; and just as he had in the case of Communist cells in the 1950s, he became the nation's strongest voice of warning and alarm. Bureaucrat to the bone, he also seized on the uneasy campus situation in 1970 to push through Congress authorization for an additional 1,000 agents.

The Director has assiduously discouraged rivals to himself and his agency. Remarkably enough, he has even opposed the widespread development of modern crime laboratories.

When William W. Greenhalgh, president of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, asked the Federal Law Enforcement Assistance Administration last June to finance a regional crime lab, Hoover wrote him a four-page letter to explain that the FBI could and should handle the job. But the basis of Greenhalgh's proposal had been that area police forces were not using the FBI's facilities—submitting only 5,300 cases, for instance, in a period when Chicago's police laboratory was handling about 150,000.

When Deke DeLoach appeared as the FBI representative on President Johnson's National Crime Commission, other members found him adamantly against anything that cast doubt on Hooverism theories of crime, FBI statistics, or the agency's status as Number One crime fighter. One result of this attitude is that the FBI, once the

to pick his successor

most modern law enforcement agency in the world, still trains policemen to fire submachine guns.

Within the FBI, the Director has co-opted or defeated every personal rival. The respected Quinn Tamm, head of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, is a former agent who had to leave the Bureau to find a place equal to his talents; and one reason for Hoover's dislike of Robert Kennedy was that, as Attorney General, Kennedy had an anticrime program of his own and appeared as a rival for leadership in the field.

Since Hoover's long-time assistant director and close friend, Clyde Tolson, also is in advanced years and suffers poor health, Hoover's iron hand has produced no logical or agreed-upon successor within the Bureau. But what the Director has produced, with his administrative power, his bureaucratic genius and his public relations skills, are the twin cults of personality—for himself and the FBI—that are basically responsible for his remarkable tenure. From the time he claimed he personally arrested Alvin Karpis in the '30s through the spy-hunting and Red-chasing days of the '40s and '50s, J. Edgar Hoover has become the nearest thing to an icon in American life. It was not for nothing—it was for sheer political expedience—that youthful John Kennedy made the reappointment of the revered J. Edgar Hoover one of his first official acts.

Later, Hoover single-handedly caused lengthy delay in Senate ratification of a consular treaty with the Soviet Union; the senators took his word that it would facilitate Communist espionage rather than President Johnson's assurance that it wouldn't. The President never had the arguments to overcome Hoover's public standing as the greatest living authority on Communists and spies, and the treaty might never have been ratified if Secretary of State Dean Rusk hadn't shifted the attack to the Director's soft underbelly. Rusk dropped the suggestion that he was *sure* Hoover's FBI could handle any conceivable spy threat; thus challenged in the image, the Director gave in.

Hoover's unchallengeable position is hardly hurt by the fact that he is also the keeper of the files —the mountain of personal dossiers the FBI has put together, mostly out of unproven allegations, during its long decades of snooping. Just how many files there are, no one but Hoover and—presumably—God knows; in the monster new building the Director is constructing on Pennsylvania Avenue, 550,000 square feet of floor space (about 12 football fields) have been allocated to their storage.

As it is told on the cocktail party circuit (where Mr. Hoover never appears), he just knows too much to be fired; he has a dossier on everyone, the martini drinkers say, together with the power to leak what is in them, or otherwise threaten the reputations and careers of Presidents, Cabinet officers, members of Congress, and others who might move against him; hence no one ever will.

This is a good story but, as far as can be learned, a bit melodramatic. Of course, the mere fact that Hoover *does* keep the files makes people—particularly critics—tread softly in his presence, whether or not he has ever used a dossier improperly. (Certainly in the case of Martin Luther King Jr., however, derogatory material from FBI files was leaked to the press.) The more basic truth is that his possession of the files has only added weight to his legend, and color to his cult of personality.

A replacement for Hoover would have to be, at the least, a man with a considerable knowledge of law enforcement problems, and with the kind of imposing reputation that would immediately restore the public confidence that would be impaired by Hoover's death or departure. And because there is a real man behind the legend, an acceptable successor also ought to have the toughness, integrity and political skill to maintain the FBI and its files relatively free from interference and corruption, as well as a personal strength of character that would not permit him to indulge capriciously or viciously the vast power that would be immediately his.

That power is suggested by the remark of a recent President who was asked if a certain FBI official was not the right man to replace Hoover. "Any man who'd do the things he's done for us," the President replied, "ought not to be the head of the FBI."

As commander of a secret police force and custodian of its files, a weak director—perhaps commanded by a determined President—could be a disaster. So could a powerful and unscrupulous director acting in concert with an autocratic President, or in disregard of a weak one.

The Director and the President, almost inevitably, are directly linked; no Attorney General can interpose himself between them, if they do not want him to. Attorney General Nicholas B. Katzenbach used to ask the FBI to stamp a notice on the many items it sent directly to the President that they had not been seen by the Attorney General. Wiretapping and bugging, leaking derogatory information, planting or destroying evidence and testimony, unwarranted surveillance and undercover penetration of organizations—these are only a few of the weapons an FBI director who wanted to use them could deploy on his own, or a President's behalf.

Bureaucrat and publicist J. Edgar Hoover has been a sometimes ruthless dictator of his subordinates' lives, but the last thing one could call Hoover is weak, and no one has shown him hungry enough for power to seize upon the dangerous possibilities of his position.

Some students of the FBI believe the system should be changed so that no one could again achieve the power that is Hoover's. The 1968 Omnibus Crime Bill provided that the next director will have to be confirmed by the Senate. Many believe the law should be further changed to limit his term of office to a specific number of years, so that he would periodically have to be renominated and reconfirmed. Others believe this procedure would put the director too much under political control. Opinion also differs about another proposal—that the head of the FBI should be an Assistant Attorney General. This would give the Attorney General direct political control of the Bureau—but is that necessarily a good thing? Many would argue that the independence of the FBI from partisan political influence is vital both to it and to the rights of citizens.

The real question probably is not so much what should be done about the Director, as whether there should be a federal agency with such sweeping powers as those of the FBI in the clandestine surveillance of citizens and the maintenance of detailed information on them. The development of computer-operated "data banks" makes this an acute question, and the congressional effort to put some restrictions on these operations may yet have considerable impact on the FBI.

To judge what Hoover has done, one must think first of what he *could* have done; by that standard and overlooking none of his faults and lapses, it is a reasonable conclusion that a President who replaced him might well do worse and could not be sure that he would do any better.

One suspects, in fact, that a number of Presidents have come to President Johnson's view of the matter. Discussing with a senator his plan to exempt Hoover from the necessity to retire, Mr. Johnson said he hoped the Director would last in his job "until I get out of here myself. *I* don't want to be the one that has to pick his successor." ■

Nixon confers with Hoover at a New York hotel a week after the 1968 election. Nixon is the eighth President Hoover has served.