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# Boss of FBI Knows Who's Boss

Part 8/2/71

A recent confidential memorandum from Attorney General John Mitchell to Director J. Edgar Hoover of the Federal Bureau of Investigation reflects a dramatic and highly significant change in the power relationships inside the Justice Department.

The subject of the Mitchell memo: The outrageous epidemic of unsolved political bombings in California, directed mainly against the Bank of America. The polite but perfectly clear message: The FBI must do better in investigating these cases. If not, the attorney general implied, another federal investigative agency might have to take over.

For Hoover to have received such a critical memo previously in his 47 years as the first and only FBI director would have been unthinkable. But it has now become routine for him to take orders from this attorney general. Thus, Mitchell has achieved what none of his more recent predecessors could seriously contemplate: becoming J. Edgar's boss in fact as well as in law.

Moreover, the subtly voiced annoyance over the California bombings contained in Mitchell's memo

reflects the fact that the Nixon administration's expression of total confidence in Hoover is mainly eye-wash. The truth is that both President Nixon and Mitchell are deeply concerned by the prospect of Hoover, now 76, as permanent lifelong director

THAT CONCERN stems not only from the fact that Hoover's continuation in power, as we have previously reported, offers a fat target for attacks on the FBI from both the Near and Far Left. More important, law enforcement experts acknowledge that the FBI's esteem as a great law enforcement agency, built by Hoover, is now slipping under Hoover. In short, the longer he stays in power the faster his luster as No. 1 G-man—and the luster of the FBI—dims.

Thus, the President and Mitchell are in a peculiar position. In public, they defend Hoover against all attacks (which actually help to keep him in power). Beneath the surface, however, they hope Hoover—somehow, some way—will get the message and voluntarily resign within the next year.

Such a resignation, though more likely than for-

merly, is still improbable. But whether Hoover stays or not, Mitchell is exercising his legal authority over the FBI. Although the three attorneys general of the Kennedy-Johnson era seldom saw Hoover from one year to the next, Mitchell frequently confers face to face with the director. The memo on the California bombings shows the intimacy of Mitchell's interest in the FBI.

Hoover is not resisiting. A seasoned expert in the art of survival, he knows that he cannot treat strongman Mitchell with the cavalier disdain he used to heap on his predecessors.

FOR EXAMPLE, as soon as he read published reports about his fees for book and movie contracts, Hoover quickly wrote a detailed letter to Mitchell itemizing just how much he had received (and how much had gone to FBI subordinates and the FBI recreation fund). To explain himself in such manner to Ramsey Clark would have been unthinkable.

Moreover, Hoover no longer has the blind devotion of his rank-and-file agents against those "horrible politicians" who used to run the Justice Department.

Inside the FBI, John Mitchell is regarded as the greatest attorney general ever, a man dedicated to the best interests of the FBI. Robert Mardian, the aggressive (and conservative) new assistant attorney general in charge of internal security, is equally popular.

In sum, then, the Left's image of J. Edgar Hoover as perpetual, absolute dictator of the FBI is out of date. If any Democrat is elected President in 1972, he will surely be fired. If Mr. Nixon is re-elected, his involuntary retirement after a long and (until recently) honorable career will be aggressively pressed.

In the meantime, with Mitchell watching the old man like a nursemaid, Hoover is not the master of his house that he used to be. For instance, after the embarrassing burglary of FBI records from the office at Media, Pa., a panicky Hoover proposed padlocking most of the FBI's 500 small field offices. Cooler heads prevailed, convincing the director to shut down only 50 or so. The incident was symbolic of the end of one-man rule at the FBI.

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