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Deterioration of the FBI

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THE FORCED resignation of the highly respected William C. Sullivan from the Federal Bureau of Investigation has exposed only a tiny corner of one of Washington's most carefully hidden scandals: the deterioration of the FBI as a law enforcement agency.

Sullivan, until recently the FBI's No. 3 man, submitted his resignation last Thursday, just one week after a tense confrontation with Director J. Edgar Hoover. But this is no mere personality dispute. In truth, some of the FBI's most competent officials, particularly in the field offices, are heartsick about what they view as Hoover's incompetent and tyrannical reign. They candidly acknowledge that the fabled FBI is not doing its job today.

With the ruthless self-preservation born of 48 years as grand vizier of the FBI, Hoover has lashed back against in-house critics. The result, hidden from public view, has been a reign of terror. Some respected FBI officials have been demoted or summarily transferred, others reduced to nervous prostration in wholly realistic fear of surveillance by Hoover agents.

ENOUGH OF THIS is known at the White House and Justice Department to redouble the private conviction

there that Hoover, 78, should go and go soon. But concern about further undermining President Nixon's standing on the right has mesmerized the administration.

It is one of Hoover's assets, then, that bitter public debate about him is cast in ideological terms. Because criticism from the left concentrates on his conservatism rather than his incompetence, conservatives gather about him protectively.

Indeed, popular accounts of differences between Hoover and Sullivan are over-ideologized. Although Hoover was unhappy with Sullivan's factually incontestable thesis that the Communist Party, U.S.A., has nothing to do with terrorist groups of the left, the basic criticism of the director from his own agents and top assistants hits the way he runs the agency.

Their complaint, never yet voiced publicly, goes like this: Contrary to the myth (accepted even by the left) that the FBI is a great law enforcement agency and the director its greatest lawman, the bureau has failed to grow with the times. Hoover has ignored new technology, including the computer. Paranoidly suspicious, he relies on yes-men within the bureau and prohibits con-

tacts with other government agencies (including the Justice Department itself).

ALTHOUGH the left views Hoover as an intolerant neo-Fascist, the truth is that he is morbidly sensitive to the merest hint of criticism, particularly in the press, including the bellowing about wiretaps. So, the director has severely restricted wiretapping, shackling the FBI's domestic intelligence operations.

From within the FBI, criticisms of Hoover's stewardship are many: Successful apprehension of fugitives has been all too infrequent. There is little zeal in going after illegal enemy aliens, and intelligence of their activities has been poor. The pilfering of FBI files at Media, Pa., was a clean case of lax security procedures.

In frustration, some of the FBI's top officials began dealing, behind Hoover's back, directly with the highly conservative chiefs of the Nixon Justice Department. Furious, Hoover struck back with his reign of terror.

In the chaos, some respected FBI agents have taken early retirement. Assistant Director James Gale, a bright light running the FBI's fight against organized crime, quit last month at age 50. Others of Gale's

caliber have found themselves suddenly deposed from key executive posts and handed bureaucratic flunky jobs. Hoover's purpose is to surround himself with officials of unquestioning obedience and docility—in short, with sycophants.

ONE RECENT SHIFT, for instance, took Charles Bates from the Chicago field office to assistant director here in charge of the general investigative division. The reason: Bates is an unquestioned Hoover sycophant. He was replaced in Chicago by Roy Moore, who in the Jackson, Miss., office performed magnificently, breaking the Ku Klux Klan—a project never having Hoover's enthusiastic support. Inside the FBI, some think his transfer was an attempt to provoke an early retirement.

Thus have Hoover's chief critics inside the FBI been neutralized—forced into retirement, transferred, demoted or frightened into submission. But the process might be the director's undoing. It has, for the first time, broken the iron wall of silence shielding what really goes on inside the FBI. Some of Hoover's shocking deficiencies are now being revealed to the public. More will come.