

Friends and foes of the FBI

THE FBI IN OUR OPEN SOCIETY. By Harry and Bonaro Overstreet. Norton. 400 pp. \$6.95.

ON COMMUNISM. By J. Edgar Hoover. Random House. 158 pp. \$4.95.

By Fred Ferretti

Forty-eight years ago, in 1921, right after Warren G. Harding began his occupation of the White House, he appointed his chum Harry Daugherty as Attorney General. Daugherty, in tandem with the chief of his Bureau of Investigation, William Burns, pursued "Reds" with great zest; reportedly presided over a thriving brokerage in pardons and liquor permits; and thoroughly intimidated those who might have had the temerity to suggest that he lacked proper dedication to public service.

What would happen to the FBI, Harry and Bonaro Overstreet ask rhetorically, if "a new Daugherty" became Attorney General? "What could prevent his infecting the Bureau with the spirit of illegality?"

Well, the Director simply could *not*, the Overstreets concede, "declare a reversal of roles and set himself up as the Attorney General's superior." Not that this would be necessary, because "Mr. Hoover and his associates have built into the Bureau certain safeguards" of professional conduct, a chain of command and job tenure, "which continue to operate while Attorneys General come and go."

Sixteen Attorneys General have come and gone since 1921 when J. Edgar Hoover was subordinate to Daugherty and Burns; and seven Presidents have passed through since 1924 when Calvin Coolidge appointed Hoover Director of the Bureau of Investigation (later renamed the Federal Bureau of Investigation), and Hoover has grown in office, despite repeated rumors that he was about to be forced out; that *this time, this President* would not reappoint him. In 45 years he has nurtured the FBI into what is one of the more efficient police investigatory bodies of the world, and has tacitly dared various Attorneys General to try to get rid of him.

The Overstreets in *The FBI in Our Open Society* trace the growth of the FBI from its birth as a sometimes-funded unit under Attorney General Charles Bonaparte (Napoleon's grandnephew) in 1909 to its current eminence. They correctly see the Bureau as a "by-product of the growth of Federal law," but their conception of how the FBI fits into American society too often becomes a mere apologia for past FBI activities which others have criticized. This is unfortunate, because the

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amount of research they have done is overwhelming, and their thesis of the indispensability of the FBI would have more weight if they had allowed the research to stand on its own, without attempting to gild it with statements that, in effect, say: "Look at the amount of digging we've done. Who can argue with our conclusions?" They feel, obviously, that no excuses have to be made for the FBI. Therefore why make them?

Their study is strongest when it attacks some of the research of two authors of previous books critical of the FBI, Max Lowenthal and Fred J. Cook; when it recounts Hoover's efforts that made a discredited unit into one which though criticized is respected; when it details the successes of the FBI in emasculating the Ku Klux Klan and in infiltrating the Communist party; when it delves into the largely similar attacks on the FBI by the Far Right and the Far Left.

Their efforts are poorest when, after condemning the FBI critics for a lack of research, the Overstreets ask questions, answer them with direct quotes from J. Edgar Hoover and present them as ultimate proof. This is not to suggest either that the Director is perforce wrong, or that the Overstreets are not satisfied that his answer is final. Obviously they believe him to be right and are satisfied. But the total effect is weakening. It would have been far better, and stronger, if they had nipped to the same degree that they wish Fred Cook had.

For example, they go briefly into the speculation that Lee Harvey Oswald might have been an agent of the FBI or the CIA, then answer it only with a perfunctory quote from the Warren Commission Report, which in turn had merely restated an FBI report to the Commission that it, the Bureau, had found no evidence to support such speculation. The recent criticisms of Hoover and the FBI by ex-agents Jack Levine and William Turner are dismissed — not always without emotion — as the products of malcontents.

Questions posed in recent years: Is the FBI too big? Is it too powerful? Has it been largely ineffective against organized crime? Has it used extra-legal procedures at times? How widespread is its use of wiretaps? are answered with No; No; No; No; and with "If the individual's privacy is threatened as never before by eavesdropping contrivances, it is also true that society is threatened as never before by forces of subversion, organized crime, and incitement to violence."

Hoover sees the same threats as do the Overstreets and lays down guidelines for combating them in *On Communism*. The first section of his book is a lengthy essay on Communism's new look; its attempted infiltration of the New Left and black revolutionary and evolutionary movements; its appeals to what Hoover regards as restless and misguided youth. The second section could be labeled "Quotations from Director J. Edgar Hoover," for, like that little Red best seller of Mao's, it is a compendium of quotes from Hoover's writings, speeches and directives arranged under general and specific headings.

The quotations, which reach back to 1920, show

We must also guard against the tendency to characterize as Communists those who merely disagree with us or who advocate unorthodox or unpopular beliefs."

He warns against vigilantism, says that neither the New Left nor the black nationalist movement is Communist, but warns that the Communists constantly attempt to infiltrate both. And Hoover tells us that the way to defeat Communism is through "the Christian pulpit — the mighty fortress of God," because "The spiritual firepower of the Christian Church — based on love of God — is sufficient to destroy all the Soviet man-made missiles and rockets and extirpate this twentieth-century aberration."

Now that's certainly something the new Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff ought to look into.

Hoover to have been at least consistent in his belief that the menace of Communism has been and will be ever with us and that we must be constantly vigilant for manifestations of it and ever cooperative with the FBI in its efforts to thwart Communism's goal of world domination by "the Big R," which is the way the Director refers to Revolution. The collection offers quotes readily usable by the Right, Left or Center.

Hoover tells us that "disrespect for law and order is a fundamental cornerstone of Communist tactics. Charges of 'police brutality,' 'illegal arrest,' and 'persecution' have long echoed in the Party press," and that these "false Communist charges unfortunately have been taken up by other groups whose basic purpose is to destroy law and order and to create chaos." But he cautions that we should not "indiscriminately label as Communists those whose opinions on a particular question may, on occasion, parallel the official Party position.

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