

6-7-73
NYT

...and Mr. Hoover

On New Year's Day 1970, President Nixon telephoned J. Edgar Hoover, then director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, to congratulate him on his 75th birthday. Later in the day, Mr. Nixon let it be known that there were no plans for Mr. Hoover's retirement.

The F.B.I. director devoted much of that year to the battle against Black Panthers, insurgent college students, anti-war Catholic priests and a variety of other groups he considered threats to the nation's security. In October 1970, the President personally handed to Mr. Hoover and Attorney General John N. Mitchell the Administration's new anticrime bill which he termed a tool in the total war against organized crime and "terrorist" activities.

Yet 1970 was also the year in which, according to Mr. Nixon, Mr. Hoover's "protest" blocked the President's efforts to expand domestic intelligence gathering. White House documents published in The Times today disclose "Mr. Hoover's concern that the civil liberties people may become upset." This was also the year in which Mr. Hoover's refusal to cooperate "shut off his agency's liaison with the C.I.A. altogether," in the President's words. This was one reason, Mr. Nixon has suggested, why ultimately the White House established its own security organization—the organization which later masterminded the Watergate and Ellsberg break-ins.

Mr. Nixon was not the only President who normally treated the late F.B.I. director with a deference that ought not to be accorded any public official in a democracy, least of all the chief of the secret police. It was nevertheless left to Mr. Nixon to extol Mr. Hoover's virtues during his lifetime and then to saddle the dead man with much of the blame for policies that ultimately led to C.I.A. and White House involvement in the Watergate scandal and its cover-up.