

THE FBI

Hoover's Closet

From the time he took over the FBI in 1924 until his death on the job in 1972, J. Edgar Hoover ran his bureau with an authority questioned by few and with a respect for the law exceeded only by his patriotism. Just how much Hoover's patriotism shaded his concern for the law in his later years was disclosed last week by Attorney General William B. Saxbe when he released the fullest details yet on the dirty-tricks operation—known as COINTELPRO, for counter-intelligence program—that the FBI carried out against activists on both the right and left from 1956 until 1971.

The aim of COINTELPRO was to disrupt the activities of the target groups,

actively tame; 40% of the total involved sending "anonymous or fictitious materials" to organizations with the hope of confusing their activities. Another 20% were concerned with directing the attention of "friendly media representatives" to damaging material about the groups that was already on the public record. But the FBI also leaked confidential material to reporters, forged papers and infiltrated agents into organizations to sabotage their activities.

To Its Knees. While maintaining that most of COINTELPRO's actions had been legal and proper, Saxbe admitted that the operation was "not something we in a free society should condone." FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley did not agree. In a carefully worded statement accompanying Saxbe's report, Kelley made it clear that he felt the FBI agents

Rev. Hosea Williams, a leading figure in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, maintains that the FBI infiltrated the mass gathering of the poor in Washington in 1968 and persuaded young people to throw tear-gas grenades at the police, who retaliated with a barrage of their own. In addition, organizations from the American Nazi Party on the right to the Socialist Workers Party on the left believe that they are still being badgered by the FBI and that their phones have frequently been tapped.

The FBI refuses to comment on these charges, but Saxbe, while ruling out disruptive counter-intelligence, was careful last week to make the point that the agency would continue to use legal and proper means to acquire intelligence that could lead to the filing of criminal charges.

If Saxbe could forbid dirty tricks by the FBI, why did not earlier Attorneys General order Hoover to halt COINTELPRO? In his statement, Kelley maintained that the Attorneys General from William P. Rogers in 1958 to Robert Kennedy in 1961 to John Mitchell in 1969 knew about COINTELPRO. In response, Nicholas Katzenbach, who held the office in 1965, said that he had never heard the term COINTELPRO. While he knew of some legal bureau activities involving the Klan, said Katzenbach, he was unaware of any disruptive campaign against groups such as CORE or the S.C.L.C. Ramsey Clark, Lyndon Johnson's last Attorney General, flatly declared: "I had no knowledge of any efforts by the FBI to disrupt the activities of people in the U.S. Such an endeavor is unlawful and unthinkable."

Notion of Tyranny. With COINTELPRO being disowned and defended, Democratic Congressman Don Edwards called into session his Judiciary subcommittee on civil and constitutional rights. Edwards had some special credentials to conduct a hearing into the role of the FBI: he had been an FBI agent. With Kelley listening, Edwards said: "I suggest that the philosophy supporting COINTELPRO is the subversive notion that any public official, the President or a policeman, possesses a kind of inherent power to set aside the Constitution whenever he thinks the public interest or 'national security' warrants it. That notion is the postulate of tyranny."

In years past, Congress has been unable—or unwilling—to mount the kind of effort necessary to exercise any real power of review over the FBI while it was Hoover's fiefdom. At the end of the day, Edwards declared that the COINTELPRO episode showed the need for "much stricter oversight of the FBI." Edwards feels that Congress is ready to take on the job, one made politically easier because extremist activity has abated in recent years. Indeed, the General Accounting Office—Congress's monitoring agency—is already planning to review the domestic spying operations of the FBI.



DEMONSTRATORS FOR THE POOR WADING IN WASHINGTON'S REFLECTING POOL (1968)
Charges that the FBI got young people to throw tear-gas grenades.

not just to gather data that might lead to prosecutions. Started as a program directed against the Communist Party, COINTELPRO was expanded in 1961 to include as targets the Socialist Workers Party and, in 1964, "white hate groups," such as the Ku Klux Klan, the Minutemen and the American Nazi Party. In 1967 the FBI turned its attention to what it called "black extremist organizations," but which included not only the militant Black Panthers but the moderate Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). In 1968 the program began covering such New Left groups as the Students for a Democratic Society (S.D.S.) and the Weatherman. Hoover stopped the campaign entirely after it was revealed by the press.

In all, said Saxbe's report, 2,370 separate acts of counter-intelligence and disruption were undertaken by the FBI against target groups. Many were rel-

would have abdicated their responsibilities had they not conducted COINTELPRO against "violence-prone groups whose publicly announced goal was to bring America to its knees."

Making the point that he was Kelley's boss, the Attorney General said that he would not approve a proposal today for a campaign like COINTELPRO. Said Saxbe: "I don't think the U.S. should be involved in going this far in domestic affairs."

Saxbe's release last week of the report on COINTELPRO stirred some angry memories—and prompted some angry charges—among groups that had been targeted by the FBI. Robert Shelton, 45, the Imperial Wizard of the United Klans of America, Inc., claims that FBI agents undermined Klan members by repeatedly questioning them on the job. Eventually, says Shelton, many employers fired the men rather than have their operations constantly disrupted. The