

New Direction of the FBI

WASHINGTON—Judgement is yet to be passed on President Nixon's ultimate choice to head the Federal Bureau of Investigation, but the President must be commended for early efforts to get the FBI out of politics.

L. Patrick Gray III, named as temporary successor to J. Edgar Hoover, says that Mr. Nixon has emphasized that he wants the FBI to be strictly nonpolitical, even to the point of asking Mrs. Gray to stop working for the Committee For the Re-election of the President.

MILLIONS OF PEOPLE had come to feel that the Bureau was so much a reflection of the troglodytic views of Hoover that it was the gendarmerie of the far right rather than an apolitical police operation.

Other Americans felt that the FBI had become less the scourge of bank robbers and spies and more the relentless enemy of groups seeking social, economic and racial reforms. Thus the FBI came to be viewed as the great protector of "the establishment."

The challenge is to restore an image to an FBI that is representative of and responsive to ALL Americans.

News stories of Hoover calling Dr. Martin Luther King "the biggest liar in the country" were enough to convince all but a handful of black Americans that the FBI was hostile toward them. Repeated revelations of buggings and wiretappings of black civil rights leaders and notables gave substance to suspicions that the FBI regarded as "subversive" any black behavior

other than shuffling Uncle Tomism.

Unfortunately, FBI hiring policies added to the alienation of minority groups from the bureau.

In 1961, then Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy complained to Hoover that of 5873 FBI agents only 11 were Negroes, eight were Spanish-Americans and one was an American Indian. After Kennedy's death Hoover revealed gratuitously that he had been so irritated about Kennedy's trying to make him "lower standards" and hire more minority group members that he had ceased speaking to Kennedy, who supposedly had been his boss.

But the hiring pressures stayed on, and by the end of 1970 the FBI could boast that of its 7689 agents 51 were blacks, 39 were Spanish-Americans and three were American Indians.

That was progress, but it still left the FBI with one of the worst personnel records in government. Fewer than one per cent of its agents were black, and there was no black or Indian and only one Spanish-American holding a "super-grade," or policy-making, job in the entire bureau.

A NEW DIRECTOR ought to change that if only for the practical reality that the FBI is inadequately staffed to do a proper job in minority communities.

But drastic personnel changes are necessary also to win the FBI the cooperation, support, and respect of all the people. Only when such broad respect is regained will anyone be able to say that the FBI is truly "out of politics."