



J. EDGAR HOOVER
A legend

The Mystery Of Hoover's Interview

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Times-Post Service

Washington

After an unwanted plunge into public controversy FBI director J. Edgar Hoover has resumed the official reticence that marked his 40 years as the Nation's most prominent and durable law enforcement officer.

Just 13 days after the 69-year-old FBI director startled the Nation with a free-swinging news conference, he held a private meeting with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the Negro civil rights leader whom he had called a "notorious liar" less than a fortnight earlier.

Significantly, the only statement from the meeting held in Hoover's office last Tuesday came from the Rev. Dr. King, who called the meeting "very amicable and very friendly" and said it "developed new levels of understanding."

LEGEND

ing roster of influential friends on Capitol Hill.

Then came the November 18 news conference, at which Hoover talked for three hours with a group of 18 women correspondents who had arranged for the meeting after persistent negotiations.

President Johnson was reported dismayed by the Hoover interview, but reason, rather than temper, was the message of his own news conference comments November 28. He expressed hope that the months ahead would demonstrate the "outstanding capacities" of the FBI and not produce a continuing "battle of personalities."

PRESIDENT

No one is saying whether Hoover heard directly from the President, but his conference with the Rev. Dr. King strongly suggested that he got the message.

In the absence of comment from Hoover, which seems improbable at present, there is no way to determine just why the FBI chief exposed himself to an on-the-record news conference after years of avoiding them.

"Some matters were raised that he (Hoover) wanted to talk about, and he talked about them," a Justice Department associate explained. This aide denied that the news conference was a precedent for any major change in Hoover's approach to public relations.

MATTERS

Why were there matters that Hoover "wanted to talk about" at a news conference? The answer has to be conjectural, but he appears to have been anxious to put out his side of the story on a number of questions.

Relations between the Rev. Dr. King and the FBI have not been entirely easy. The bureau has let it be known that the Negro leader has had associations it questions. It has complained of occasional difficulties in interviewing him and feels that his past criticisms of the FBI were unfair.

rights. The agency's view is that its function is investigative; that it lacks both the authority and the manpower to undertake direct protection of anyone.

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