

Washington Post carries fuller version.

## Washington Insight

SFChronicle JUN 5 1973



# The FBI's Role in Exposing Watergate

Joseph Kraft

THE Federal Bureau of Investigation—more than the press, the courts, the Congress and all other government agencies combined—led the way in resisting and exposing what we now know as the Watergate conspiracy.

In the process, the FBI itself developed a true crisis of authority. So the FBI now affords a supreme object lesson as to the requirements for rebuilding government after Watergate.

The FBI, we now know, came into the Watergate picture back in 1970 when the White House first began calling on the agencies of government to provide political information by wiretap and other dubious means. The one person inside government who refused was the director of the bureau, J. Edgar Hoover.

★ ★ ★

THE FBI next came into the picture immediately after the Watergate burglary of June 17, 1972. By the second week of July, an FBI team under the supervision of Charles Nuzum had developed all the information necessary to bring the men who participated in the burglary to trial. The FBI agents were confident (rightly it turned out) that under pressure of sentencing the guilty men would break and spill the beans on the higher-ups.

But the trial was delayed until after the election—apparently on orders of the prosecutors at the Justice Department. FBI agents were deterred—in part by Hoover's successor, acting director L. Patrick Gray—from thorough questioning of the higher-ups.

With their professional reputations on

the line, FBI agents began airing their suspicions. The result was the first big set of Watergate stories before the election showing that the break-in was part of a larger campaign of sabotage involving President Nixon's closest personal and political advisers.

The FBI became more deeply embroiled after the elections when the President named Gray to be director of the bureau in his own right. The upshot was a new wave of leaks which centered around Gray and began to surface in his Senate confirmation hearings. Out of these leaks came the major evidence of the attempt to cover up Watergate and the resignation of H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman from the White House staff. As part of the shakeup, Gray was replaced.

★ ★ ★

THE RECORD of the FBI on Watergate is so extraordinary, its determination to force out the truth in such staggering contrast with the rest of the executive branch, that it raises a question. How come? Why was the FBI so different from the CIA and the Justice Department and the staff of the National Security Council?

The answer is J. Edgar Hoover. He was the compleat bureaucrat. He made the FBI a supremely professional law-enforcement agency with elan, discipline and a profound sense of institutional loyalty. In the crunch, the institutional loyalty, the sense of fidelity to law enforcement, was proof against the demands of the White House. Despite the powerful pull of presidential loyalty, the FBI went out and won one for J. Edgar Hoover.