

Watching over the FBI

A few years ago, when I was revealing some of J. Edgar Hoover's police state tactics and the late FBI director was castigating me as a "racist," I got enough nasty mail to paper the walls of San Quentin.

It was obvious that millions of Americans did not want to believe me or my assertions that we had reached the frightful state where Big Brother was tapping the phones and bugging the boudoirs of congressmen, government workers, newspapermen political opponents and just about anyone else worth spying on.

What a shock it ought to be to those Americans (and all others) to have William D. Ruckelshaus, acting FBI director, reveal that 17 wiretaps were placed on government officials and newsmen from 1969 to 1971.

How chilling it must be for millions of Americans to learn that Henry Kissinger was playing ball with the FBI in tapping the phones of his own staff members.

It must appall Americans that the White House would lock up the logs of those wiretaps for fear that Hoover would use them against his boss, the attorney general, or his big boss, the President of the United States!

Well take my word: You have only begun to hear the sinister truth about how far this country has gone toward emulating

Hitler's Germany or a Communist tyranny.

Ruckelshaus' announcement exposed just the tip of a polluted iceberg of FBI abuses, some carried out at the instigation of White House officials and some flowing directly from the special hatreds and prejudices of Hoover himself.

As the Watergate revelations grow, you are going to learn some shocking things about:

- How Hoover stayed in power so long by delicately blackmailing congressmen, cabinet members and even Presidents by digging up dirt on them or their close relatives.

- How political abuses led to many illegal wiretaps and buggings. Several important court convictions of drug peddlers and others are going to be overturned, just as the Ellsberg-Russo trial and charges were dismissed, because of illegal electronic surveillance.

- Some of Hoover's associates will finally reveal how he hated Negroes and Jews—to the extent that he barred members of those minorities from jobs as special agents in charge of FBI offices around the country or from key jobs within Bureau headquarters.

- How the FBI got away with flagrant abuses because there were no governmental or press probings into the operations of the Bureau. The appropriations hearings before Congress were a farce. The

FBI had its agents actually working for the Congressional committees, ensuring a soft reception. This secret bureau kept its own lobbyists on the Hill, ensuring that the Congressmen never asked the wrong questions.

When it is all told, the American people ought to be seething—and trembling in their socks. And they had better give urgent priority to building up some safeguards against a new, precipitous slide into police statism.

As I suggested in an earlier column, we must never again permit one man to make the FBI his personal fiefdom. No FBI director must ever again be able to blackmail the topmost men in public life.

At the same time, we must never permit the FBI director to fall under total control of the attorney general, who too often of late has been a politician, or even the President.

There must be some kind of powerful commission with the responsibility of watching over the work of the FBI — including its most sensitive missions.

If you doubt the need for such drastic action, keep reading. Some hair-curdling revelations are in the wind that may finally make you see how close we have come to losing liberty in this land.

Perhaps — just perhaps — those revelations will wake up enough Americans.