

filed Hoover

THE TOP COP AND SNOOPING ISSUE

by Max Frankel

Washington, April 15 - When a Republican President is less than zealous in the defense of J. Edgar Hoover against his leading Democratic challenger, it can be fairly deduced that the nation's legendary top cop is in trouble. Responding to Senator Edmund S. Muskie's charges of unwarranted snooping on peaceful assemblies on last year's Earth Day, the White House says that it is against such surveillance and doubts that the Federal Bureau of Investigation has done anything contrary to policy.

But it is shielding the President from immediate involvement in the controversy. It is avoiding comment on the demands for a citizens commission to control domestic spying. And it is obviously resisting the old political reflex of rushing to Mr. Hoover's side against anyone who dares to question the probity of the G-men.

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With the nation's confidence thus diminished, Mr. Nixon avoided a full embrace of Mr. Hoover as long ago as last December. Asked about the director's charges against the Berrigans, the President said that he would not comment on the case, paid tribute to Mr. Hoover's great service over the years and said cautiously that he approved "generally" of his actions.

Nothing said since then by the White House has erased the impression that Mr. Nixon would welcome an opportunity to retire Mr. Hoover with honor, provided that it could be done without offending his constituency and without appearing to yield to their common adversaries. That is why some officials think that the recent commotion has made it more difficult to replace the director in the foreseeable future.

HANSFIELD BACKS HOOVER AND F.B.I.: RIDICULES CRITICS

by Warren Weaver Jr.

Washington, April 15 - During his briefing, Mr. Ziegler went to some length to differentiate between Administration policy on surveillance and F.B.I. activities, of which he claimed ignorance. He defended the agency vigorously for its law enforcement record over the years but did not mention Mr. Hoover.

(Fuller account, NYTimes 15 Apr 71, filed Surveillance.)