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Politics And the F.B.I.

by Tom Wicker

The Watergate scandal, charges of Republican fund-raising irregularities, and the possibility that some big dealers made an illicit killing on the sale of \$750 million in grains to the Soviet Union ought to revive interest in the pending appointment of a permanent director for the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

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The Democrats are making much political hay, for instance, of the fact that a Republican Justice Department and a Republican political figure, temporarily in control of the F.B.I., are those charged with investigating the Watergate affair, in which Republican officials and the Committee to Re-elect the President are at least suspected of being implicated.

How, they ask righteously, can anyone expect that in such circumstances the Watergate investigation will be pushed to the limit, no matter who might be involved? So when Attorney General Kleindienst, a partisan Republican if there ever was one, says - as he just did on the Dick Cavett Show - that the seven men indicted in the Watergate raid were acting without the permission of Republican superiors, he suffers from a built-in credibility gap. So did Mr. Gray when in a speech reminiscent of J. Edgar Hoover at his bureaucratic best - or worst - he fell back on statistics (333 agents, 14,000 man-hours, 1,800 leads, etc.) to prove his agency's diligence.

The point is not that the Democrats are necessarily right; the point is that they are plausible when they charge that Republicans are not going to prosecute Republicans effectively. And the same point arises in connection with Democratic allegations of major irregularities in the raising of Republican campaign funds in the days before the rigorous new election finance law went into effect. Who is going to believe that Mr. Kleindienst and Mr. Gray are leaving no stone unturned on that one? The question remains, even if, in fact, they are doing their best.

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