

FBI - II

ACTORS 'CLEARED' FOR F.B.I. SERIES

Stars of TV Show Checked
Out by the Agency—Policy
Questioned by Guild

ACTION CALLED NORMAL

One Union Member Had Felt
His Rights Were Violated
by Bureau's Inquiry

By JACK GOULD

The four principal players in the forthcoming television series of dramatizations on the work of the Federal Bureau of Investigation were cleared by the agency before getting their assignments.

The F.B.I. check was in the nature of a routine inquiry to make certain that the performers had not indulged in political activities or criminal pursuits that might cause embarrassment for the bureau after the show was on the air.

The Screen Actors Guild on the West Coast confirmed yesterday that Efrem Zimbalist Jr. Stephen Brooks, Lynn Loring and Philip Abbot had been "briefly checked out" by the F.B.I. before being engaged to impersonate agents or members of the families of agents. None of the actors will have access to classified information in the performance of their roles.

Under a little-known law, the F.B.I. has the right to review any commercial use of its name. When the bureau made arrangements for the show, it was learned, the American Broadcasting Company and Quinn Martin and Warner Brothers, the producers, agreed to let the F.B.I. review scripts and casting plans.

The bureau's program, entitled "The F.B.I.," opens in September on the A.B.C. network.

In some television quarters, the disclosure of the F.B.I. scrutiny of actors was seen as an example of the recurring conflict between public relations considerations and maximum artistic freedom in the medium.

No Question Involved

An executive close to the negotiations for the series said there never was any question of the F.B.I.'s prerogative to protect its reputation.

If an active Communist or erstwhile burglar turned up in a drama romanticizing the F.B.I., it was noted, the bureau could become a national laughing stock.

In Washington an F.B.I. spokesman implied some precautions had been taken but

insisted it was not bureau policy to make full security check on persons connected with show involving the agency. No such checks were made in the case of the film entitled "The F.B.I.," starring James Stewart, he said.

For many years, however, J. Edgar Hoover, director of the bureau has taken a direct personal interest in broadcasting shows and feature length films involving the bureau. In 1954, at his request, Congress passed a law prohibiting any commercial use of the bureau's name, initials or seal without the director's approval of all arrangements.

The legislation was understood at the time to have been prompted by a radio series that Mr. Hoover regarded as an inaccurate portrayal of the F.B.I. and its agents.

One broadcaster said it was not unusual for governmental agencies to pass on scripts and casts as the price for their cooperation in furnishing technical advice and sometimes use of their facilities.

"There's nothing new or sinister about the F.B.I. policy," he said. "If an actor in his personal life was given a dishonorable discharge you don't put him in "The West Point Story" even if he's the most talented performer in the world. It's just common sense."

The spokesman for the Screen Actors Guild said that the leading players in the series were asked to furnish their true names, ages and places of birth. He added that secondary players who might change from week to week were not going to be checked out.

Guild concern over the clearance matter followed a complaint from one of its members. The member raised the question of whether a review of an actor's private life before employment was not tantamount to introducing a "blacklist."

The performer maintained any clearance procedure tended to invite damaging speculation and gossip that an actor may have lost a role for other than purely professional reasons. A rejection by "The F.B.I." series, the performer argued further, might prompt other producers not to take a chance in signing the player.

Despite the screen guild's statement that secondary players were not being reviewed it was understood that the Los Angeles office of the F.B.I. had an agent assigned on a regular basis to safeguard the bureau's reputation in matters of employment on the series.

The Screen Actors Guild said that it had not voiced any objections to the F.B.I. clearance of the four principals because of the limited nature of the inquiry and the special circumstances of a show bearing the bureau's name.

The matter of clearance of actors has been one of the most sensitive political issues in the TV medium ever since the publication in 1950 of a booklet called "Red Channels," a list of actors accused of pro-Red sym-

pathies or activities, resulted in the dismissal of some performers and the "blacklisting" of many others.

Sponsors rejected the players on the ground they were "controversial" and might offend potential customers for advertised merchandise.

In recent years blacklisting has substantially subsided but a few players say they never receive TV job offers despite their prominence in other field of entertainment.

NYTimes, 11 Oct. 1965

SUNDAY PROGRAMS
The F.B.I. (A.B.C. 8 P.M.).
The Federal Bureau of Investigation has put its seal of endorsement on a cheap detective series.