

Editorials

Question for Hoover

NEVADA'S GOVERNOR SAWYER has asked J. Edgar Hoover why his Federal Bureau of Investigation cynically flouts the laws of Nevada.

This is a good question which clearly deserves a direct and unequivocal answer.

It was asked in a letter to the FBI director (with a copy to President Johnson) in which the Governor demands that Hoover "or someone in high authority" explain why the FBI, in investigating the alleged "skimming" of gambling profits by the State's casinos, "did not feel bound by the criminal laws of this State."

Those laws prohibit the use of wire-taps and electronic eavesdropping devices except in cases involving conspiracy to overthrow the government — and then only after proper judicial review. FBI agents have nevertheless admitted widespread and systematic use of such devices in their search for evidence against the gambling establishments. Director Hoover has now confirmed their use, saying that his bureau "had full authority of the Justice Department to install these microphones."

THE DIRECTOR'S PLEA in exculpation compounds rather than excuses the grave offense; it alarmingly suggests that the police-state methods of the FBI have the sanction of a Federal Department which calls itself the Department of Justice. This arrogant disregard of law has been likened by Governor Sawyer to the conduct of Hitler's Nazis, and he has our complete agreement when he says that the Department of Justice may not authorize anybody to violate the laws of the State of Nevada.

Governor Sawyer has previously demanded prosecution of the FBI agents who installed and used the illegal listening devices, and a civil suit for damages has been brought against the FBI by a Las Vegas casino which charges that its privacy was invaded by FBI "bugs."

This is not the first time the FBI has been caught in the disgraceful act of breaking the law to obtain evidence of lawbreaking. It is time that its director, who has long enjoyed a curious immunity from official censure or criticism, should be restrained from further trampling upon the law that his bureau is intended to enforce.