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FBI Facing First Monitoring on Hill

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For the first time in a generation, there are strong indications that Congress will begin serious monitoring of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Changes in congressional membership and attitudes—coupled with changes in the FBI itself—have increased the prospects for congressional oversight of bureau activities. Clear notice already has been served on the FBI that some of its assumptions will have to be re-examined.

The changes are in marked contrast to past years, when J. Edgar Hoover ran the FBI and Rep. John J. Rooney (D-N.Y.) was chairman of the House appropriations subcommittee that reviewed the Justice Department's budget, which includes FBI funds. Although Rooney had a reputation for rough treatment of administration officials, his relationship with Hoover was characterized by one long-time Justice Department official as a "love feast."

Now Hoover and Rooney are gone and previously untouched institutions are being subjected to closer scrutiny in the wake of Watergate.

The General Accounting Office, the investigating arm of Congress, is conducting the first study it has ever made of FBI operations. At the request of the House Judiciary Committee, it will examine the FBI's domestic intelligence programs. But according to well-informed sources, the GAO study is intended to be only the first of a continuing program to examine other FBI activities.

Further evidence of a change is provided by reports that House Judiciary Committee Chairman Peter W. Rodino Jr. (D-N.J.) told freshman congressmen that one of his priority items in the new Congress will be to have his committee given budget authorization power for the Justice Department.

Rodino, according to a source close to him, believes that "he will never have true oversight power, he will never be able to do the kind of oversight job he feels is necessary unless he has authorization power. He's just adamant about that."

"You can be sure J. Edgar never came here. But if they know you're going to cut everything to hell, they'll sure come talk to you."

That the FBI agreed to cooperate with the GAO is itself a sign of changing times. One source says that when a House judiciary subcommittee under Rep. Don Edwards (D-Calif.) first attempted to seek information from the FBI, the bureau offered to brief Rodino and the ranking Republican on the committee, Rep. Edward



DON EDWARDS



PETER W. RODINO JR.

... congressmen eye FBI activities

Hutchinson (R-Mich.). Rodino, however, directed the FBI to Edwards' subcommittee.

"The FBI doesn't select the members it deals with," another source said. "In Rodino's eyes they're all equal."

The purpose of having the GAO investigate the FBI is three-fold, according to one

source involved in the project: to look at programs that have never been examined by anyone outside the FBI, to help the FBI improve its efficiency and to impress upon the FBI its accountability to Congress and the public.

FBI officials assert that they welcome congressional monitoring of the bureau's

activities, but caution that there are limits to how open any investigative agency can be.

"As far as oversight is concerned," one bureau official said, "nobody made it clearer than (FBI Director) Clarence M. Kelley during his confirmation hearings that he welcomes it."

According to this bureau official and others, the FBI sees oversight as a means of dispelling the "mystique" that has grown up around the bureau and increasing congressional understanding of what the bureau does.

Several sources said that the FBI under Kelley is already far more open and cooperative than it was under Hoover. Coming months will show whether that policy extends to opening FBI operations to congressional inspection.

"Kelley talks a lot about responsiveness," said one Justice Department official, "but I'm not convinced that he's really serious about it."