PRESIDENT SEEKS TO RETAIN HOOVER

Might Waive Retirement of F.B.I. Chief Set for Jan. 1

BY ANTHONY LEWIS
Special to The New York Times
WASHINGTON, May 3—President Johnson is considering a plan to waive the compulsory retirement age for J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Mr. Hoover will be 70 years old next Jan. 1, and he would ordinarily have to step down on that birthday. But the chances are that he will remain in the job that has become so identified with him.

He took over as director of the F.B.I. on May 10, 1924. This will be 40 years ago next Sunday, and President Johnson may well use the occasion of this anniversary to issue an order allowing Mr. Hoover to remain as director after he passes 70.

Few doubt that Mr. Hoover will stay on if he can. Some years ago there was talk of his retirement, but he has given no recent indication of wanting to give up the prestige and power he has accumulated.

Mr. Hoover is a phenomenon in Washington—an official who rarely if ever receives anything but praise from politicians of either party.

As F.B.I. director he has built up over the years substantial independence from his own superior, the Attorney General and from any real Congressional control of F.B.I. appropriations or policies.

This independence has been both praised and criticized. It is valued especially as an assurance that the F.B.I. will not be involved in partisan politics. Mr. Hoover has never registered in either party and has made a point of emphasizing his nonpartisanship.

Critics think it is wrong in a key government post to be so independent of the President. They also think Mr. Hoover has gained excessive personal power by controlling espionage and officials. They say Mr. Hoover has used his position to squelch any criticism of him.

If the President does waive the Retirement Act for Mr. Hoover at his 70th birthday, the reaction will depend on the health of Mr. Hoover and on whether the President is willing to override the wishes of Congress.

The one area in which the bureau and its director have not been criticized is its good health. Mr. Hoover has been in good health since he joined the bureau and has been in good health ever since.

Johnson Won't Let Hoover Quit

WASHINGTON—President Johnson isn't going to let J. Edgar Hoover retire when he reaches 70 next January 1. According to the White House, the usual mandatory retirement age for Government personnel.

White House sources said yesterday that Mr. Johnson intends to waive the 70-year retirement rule to allow the veteran F.B.I. director to remain in charge of the bureau.

The custom is to extend the retirement for one year, but there is no limit on how often the President can do this.

Hoover will have held the F.B.I. post 40 years next Sunday. He was appointed on May 10, 1924 during the administration of President Calvin Coolidge. He has served under 13 attorneys general.

Hoover is reported to be in good health and ready to keep his job if Johnson asks him to stay.