

HOOVER, 69, FEELS FIT FOR F.B.I. POST

Has No Desire to Retire—
Hails Bureau's Record

WASHINGTON, Dec. 4 (AP)—J. Edgar Hoover has served 40 years as director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation under seven Presidents and has no plans to retire.

"I feel fine," Mr. Hoover, who is 69 years old, said in an interview. "I'm in better physical condition than I have been in years. And I intend to remain active because I just don't like the rocking-chair life. If I retired, I wouldn't enjoy life very much."

Mr. Hoover, who has been Bureau Director since 1924, is 33 pounds lighter than he was six years ago. He appears to have lost little of his restless energy.

President Johnson waived last May the requirement that he retire at the age of 70—which he reaches in January.

"If I quit," Mr. Hoover said, "I think I would have trouble. After three or four days of vacation, I get so itchy for activity that I call the office and ask them to send me some work."

Health Is First Interest

The F.B.I. chief was at first more interested in talking of his health than such matters as his controversy with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and his annoyance with the Warren Commission's report on the assassination of President Kennedy.

Recently, Newsweek magazine said President Johnson had decided to find a new F.B.I. director. It described the President as a "disenchanted fan" of Mr. Hoover. The White House denied the report.

As to his differences with Dr. King, whom he recently called "a notorious liar," Mr. Hoover declared: "I don't enjoy a controversy and I don't go looking for one. I have tried for years to avoid public disputes. But I cannot let attacks on the F.B.I. go unchallenged when they are not justified. If I didn't speak out in defense of my agents, I would have no morale left in this organization."

For several months Mr. Hoover has been smarting under reports of criticisms from civil rights leaders, which he believed added up to deriding the efforts of the F.B.I. to bring to justice the men guilty of slaying civil rights workers and bombing Negro homes and churches in the South; advising Negroes not to take their problems to the F.B.I.; saying most F.B.I. agents were Southerners who were not sympathetic to the Negroes' cause; blam-

'Time To Be Blunt'

"The time had come to be blunt," he said. "Public trust in the F.B.I. is an important part of law enforcement and national security. If that trust is chipped away, our defense against crime espionage and subversion is weakened."

"They seem to forget that we have been in the fight to preserve civil rights for the past 40 years. We were fighting against injustices before many of our present critics were born."

Mr. Hoover said that pressures had increased to turn the bureau into a national police force, that those who should know better were suggesting that more of the responsibilities of law enforcement should be transferred from local police to it.

"It has been intimated that in protecting the life of the President of the United States," he said, "that Federal officers should take into custody every one who might conceivably be a threat to the President's life when he visits a city."

"This would mean picking up every Communist, kook and beatnik in a city and holding them without charge. If Federal officers did this, there would be a tremendous uproar over the violation of these people's civil rights—and rightly so."

Calls Report Unjustified

Mr. Hoover still thinks the Warren Commission was unjustified in chiding the F.B.I. for not having passed information about Lee Harvey Oswald to the Secret Service. He contends that there was nothing in the record to suggest that Oswald was a potential assassin.

"Total security for the President of the United States is ridiculous," Mr. Hoover declared. "When he is gregarious and loves to move around, you can't box him in."

Mr. Hoover also spoke of pressure from civil rights leaders for the F.B.I. to give personal protection to civil rights workers and those demonstrating for civil rights causes.

"They want us to be bodyguards and to give personal protection," he said, "but that is impossible. It was even suggested at one time that our agents should drive the buses used by Freedom Riders going across Alabama. I refused to do it. Our agents cannot be chauffeurs for any cause."

"After all that has been written, so few people know what we legally can do and can't do. Our agents cannot be used as instruments for social reform. They are law-enforcement agents. Their job is to gather facts when there is an indication that a Federal law has been violated. These facts are presented to the Department of Justice, and the department decides whether there will be or will not be a prosecution."

"An F.B.I. agent is not authorized to pass judgment on the guilt or innocence of a per-

"I believe," Mr. Hoover added, "the F.B.I. is operating on sound principles. My duty is to see that it keeps a steady course and is not used to serve any pressure group."