

The F.B.I.'s "Seal of Approval"

Senator Long of Missouri, under criticism for allegedly manipulating his subcommittee's investigation of wiretapping in such a way as to help James R. Hoffa, has produced the politician's equivalent of the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval: a letter of commendation from Federal Bureau of Investigation Director J. Edgar Hoover.

The letter was written sixteen months ago in a different context, but Mr. Hoover has evidently not objected to Senator Long's making use of it in his present difficulties. The letter says that Senator Long's wiretapping inquiries "were certainly marked by complete objectivity and fairness. . . . We consider the searching inquiries made by you completely justified and, therefore, we were happy to submit our procedures for your close scrutiny."

There is—or should be—something extraordinary about a career civil servant like Mr. Hoover patting a member of the United States Senate on the head in this fashion. As a public official the F.B.I. Director would presumably have to cooperate with any duly authorized Congressional investigation whether he regarded it as "completely justified" or not. Possibly Mr. Hoover's gratitude that Senator Long was content to confine his "searching inquiries" of the F.B.I. to private conferences and refrained from calling him or any of his subordinates as witnesses at public hearings had something to do with prompting the letter. But Mr. Hoover's attitude that he is a bureaucratic law unto himself also helps account for the letter's condescending tone.

This is not the first time the head of the F.B.I. has conferred the patronage of his approval on members of the Senate. Thus, in 1960, when Senator Mundt of South Dakota was engaged in a close race for reelection, he used in his campaign a letter from Mr. Hoover singling him out along with a few other members of Congress for outstanding work against Communism.

The monthly F.B.I. Law Enforcement Bulletin is a favorite forum for these *ex cathedra* pronouncements. In the latest issue Mr. Hoover criticizes the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders for warning of possible violence in major cities this summer.

"Police officials, as well as the general public, are becoming weary of persons who, for self-aggrandizement and monetary gain, exploit noble causes and agitate peaceful groups into rioting mobs," Mr. Hoover writes.

Dr. King was probably ill advised to phrase his remarks as he did, but Mr. Hoover has no place making such statements. The Law Enforcement Bulletin ought to be strictly informational. The health of democracy is not improved when an influential policeman passes public judgment on members of the Senate and the opinions of private citizens.