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Hoover Testimony Factual, Not Political

No one has quite dared as yet to make an open threat of reprisal against FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover for his recent testimony in the Harry Dexter White spy case. But behind-the-scenes mutterings indicate strong resentment in some Democratic circles against the man whose statement was severely damaging to the Democratic theory of why a known spy was kept in important government position. Some partisan commentators have fanned this resentment by repeatedly deploring, in tones of pretended regret at having to mention it, what they term Mr. Hoover's entry into politics.

There was politics in the affair, as everyone is well aware, but Mr. Hoover did not create it and it can not reasonably be said he was attempting to further it. If Mr. Hoover and his agency were drawn into a situation highly charged with politics, it was something that was not of his own doing. None except the most partisan could ascribe to the FBI director any motive except that of defending the integrity of the investigative agency he has headed for 29 years and which in that time has won the respect and confidence of the American people to extraordinary degree.

Mr. Hoover's statement was intended to stress that the FBI had strictly adhered to what he considered its proper function—that of acting as the government's agency of investigation and leaving policy decisions to "higher authority." It was intended to make clear that the FBI had entered into no agreement to retain Mr. White or other suspected spies in government service, as persistently circulated rumors and reports intimated it had done. It was intended to emphasize that he did not consider the retention of Mr. White, or his promotion to an International Monetary Fund post, as anything but "unwise," and that he so advised his superiors.

If his recital was damaging and even devastating to the explanation offered by the Democrats for their handling of the case, that was not Mr. Hoover's fault.

If he said he was never called upon to make a decision as to the White appointment, that was something which former President Truman studiously failed to make clear in his nationwide radio-television speech. If he said that the transfer of Mr. White to the monetary fund hampered, instead of helping, FBI surveillance of him, that was a thing the American people needed to know and a point on which he could speak with greatest authority. And if he said that five employes under investigation for espionage were dismissed from government service in the seven-month period after the White appointment, thus blowing up the contention that the policy was to keep them in order not to endanger the success of the investigation, that is a matter of record.

The FBI director was reciting facts—facts backed up by the records of his agency. They were facts which the American people needed to know in order to arrive at an informed opinion in a situation which rumor and insinuation and veiled charges had tended to confuse rather than to clarify. Mr. Hoover rendered no judgments. He merely did what he conceives it to be the function of his agency to do—lay the facts on the table and leave judgments to others. If there was anything political in his performance, it was in the facts themselves and the direction in which they pointed.

What Mr. Hoover's testimony shows that should be taken to heart by the country is that the FBI has been doing an efficient job in ferreting out the dangerously disloyal and subversive in government, but that its efforts have been too often frustrated and its warnings have gone too often unheeded. The resentment in some quarters because of Mr. Hoover's appearance before the Senate subcommittee undoubtedly is due in large part to realization that this is the main impression the American people will draw from his testimony. The impression will not be erased by trying to pin a political label on Mr. Hoover.