

CURRENT COMMENT

All the King's Men

The myth of the Federal Bureau of Investigation has been one of the most potent pieces of Americana in the past half century, celebrated in the media, enshrined in the rhetoric of both political parties and summed up in the person of J. Edgar Hoover. So long as Mr. Hoover lived, the myth remained inviolate. Since his death and the subsequent revelations about FBI participation in the Watergate cover-up, belief in the impartiality and integrity of the Bureau has crumbled badly.

And the flaws were deeper and more pervasive than anyone imagined. According to the recently released staff report of the Church committee, the FBI has been engaged in political espionage for decades, doing the bidding of Presidents and their lieutenants from Franklin D. Roosevelt on. What emerges from the details of the report is the classic story of enormous power wielded by a few individuals without fear of public disclosure. Under the guise of "national defense," FBI agents conducted electronic surveillance of White House aides, newsmen and political opponents of incumbent Presidents; they collected gossip, information on political scandals and details of individuals' private lives and passed them on to higher superiors who then shared them with friends in the White House and elsewhere. The prolonged harassment of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. represents the most heinous example of these police-state tactics, but he was certainly not alone.

Certain defenders of former President Nixon have greeted these accounts of political skulduggery in past Administrations with an understandable display of *Schadenfreude*. But they miss the point when they go on to argue that he was unfairly punished because other Presidents engaged in similar activities. It is indeed unfortunate that the nature and the extent of the FBI's political abuses have only recently come to light, but that in no way excuses Mr. Nixon's political subversion of the bureau or, even more, his attempt to interfere with an actual criminal investigation. What it does underline, however, is the need for close Congressional supervision of the FBI and a regular rotation of its top officials. Empire-building must no longer be tolerated in the bureau or anywhere else in the federal government.

A Life With Light for Others

At Pearl Harbor on December 7, President Ford asked a plaintive question: "Can't we have living heroes, patriots of peace, and raise our monuments to lives well lived—rather than memorials to lives snuffed out in the black smoke of battle?"

At home that morning, the President's fellow citizens

might easily have echoed his remark as they crawled through the fat Sunday editions of their newspapers. The streets of Beirut, they learned, had become a battlefield again; the war in Angola was forcing starvation on a million tribesmen, and civil strife had intensified in Timor, a spot hitherto less familiar to Americans than the surface of the moon. Irish Republican Army guerrillas were holding hostages in London, and South Moluccans were doing the same at two spots in the Netherlands while factions on the left and right shot one another up in Argentina. Meanwhile, Dr. Harold C. Urey, one of this country's most distinguished scientists, warned the rest of us that "the greatest problem facing this planet is still the nuclear-thermonuclear bomb."

Confronted with these dispiriting reports, most people would welcome some good news about heroes, which is probably why the 1975 Holy Year has had so many canonizations and beatifications. The latest of these was one of the most instructive: the beatification on November 16 of Giuseppe Moscati, a Neapolitan physician who died in 1927 when he was 47. This was a saint who wore a carefully trimmed mustache and pince-nez and would have great-grandchildren attending those beatification ceremonies in St. Peter's Square. He was also a distinctly contemporary man who wrote research reports for medical journals and was an innovative surgeon. In addition, he was a tireless doctor to the poor and died while making his rounds. It was not, however, Dr. Moscati's natural talent that lifted him to heroism, but the quality of his religious conviction. His religion, said Pope Paul VI, was "alive because it was professed in the exercise of charity." No doubt that is the essence of the finest heroism. As Ernest Hello, a leader in the 19th-century French Catholic revival, once said: the true Christian "is rescued from mediocrity by the Hand that rules the world. The man who loves is never mediocre."

Back on Center Stage

Shifting nuances in U.S. policy toward the Middle East are not calculated to make the headlines.

And so, unfortunately, a highly significant statement last month by a minor Washington official to a Congressional committee went practically unnoticed. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Harold Saunders told the assembled Congressmen: "The issue is not whether Palestinian interests should be expressed in a final [Middle East] settlement, but how." He then proceeded to discuss a range of options, suggesting that UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 should provide a common basis for negotiations. The framework for such talks may not yet exist, he

admitted, as long as the Palestine Liberation Organization refuses to accept the existence of the state of Israel. But if the PLO should change its approach, the United States would expect Israel to respond. "We are prepared to consider any reasonable proposal from any quarter, and we will expect other parties to the negotiations to be equally open-minded."

This sudden admission on the part of the United States that the Palestine issue is indeed central to the Middle East peacemaking process is a significant straw in the wind. It means that Washington is serving notice that it is not prepared to go on indefinitely subscribing to Israel's interpretation of the Palestinians' role in the dispute. It is so being read in Israel, moreover, where a few bold spirits, reportedly among them no less a figure than Foreign Minister Yigal Allon, have been heard to suggest much the same as Mr. Saunders. The government itself, however, has thus far shown no inclination to relax its rigid policy toward the Palestinians and the creation of a Palestinian state. That policy is generally assumed (more often outside the United States, of course) to be based on two principles: 1) that Washington, despite occasional spats, will in the end give Israel what it wants, and 2) that as long as Israel has its agreement of sorts with Egypt, no other Arabs really matter.

Was the Saunders statement intended to convey the idea that Israel may have been taking too much for granted for too long? Certainly, Israel is not about to lose its lone sponsor. On the other hand, the signs that Washington may be running out of patience are becoming more frequent. Israel's latest response to the challenge—the death-dealing bombing raids on Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps, in which close to 100 people (many of them women and children) were killed—has hardly stirred enthusiasm. The resort to terrorism, whether Israeli or Arab, is a sign of bankruptcy of leadership. Like it or not, the Palestinians are back on center stage. They are going to have to be dealt with—with something more imaginative than indiscriminate bombs.

South Africa Goes to War

If large-scale involvement of Cuban troops and Soviet supplies were the only form of foreign interference in the Angola civil war, the Organization of African Unity could perhaps unite in opposition to it ("Moscow Eyes the South Atlantic," 12/13, p. 410). But the increasing involvement of South Africa—which among Africans is at least as objectionable as any Soviet activity—has driven both Tanzania and Nigeria to recognize the Soviet-supported Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola.

OAU President Idi Amin of Uganda, having denounced Soviet policy, later found it necessary to warn the two armies opposed to the MPLA that their South African support is also an unacceptable form of interference.

South Africa is of course deeply troubled by the prospect of an Angola government allied with Moscow, since its illegally held territory of Southwest Africa shares a long border with the newly independent nation. Reports from Johannesburg speak of "a kind of war fever" there. Estimates of the numbers of South African troops already deployed in Angola suggest a minimum of 2,500, with several thousand more in preparation; such figures indicate that there are as many South Africans involved as Cubans, and it is no secret that the South African arsenal is more than capable of keeping them and their allies well armed. The MPLA appears nevertheless to have the upper hand in the fighting, and perhaps the most probable outcome within the near future will be a hollow MPLA "victory" followed by a long guerrilla-style civil war.

South African calls for American help have been loud and clear and are cast in terms of a struggle against Communist expansion reminiscent of the Cuban missile crisis. In fact, the United States has been indirectly active in Angola since the early 1960's. Compared with present Soviet involvement, such activity has been negligible, but, given the long history of U. S. tolerance for South Africa and its policies, it does reduce the credibility of U. S. opposition to Soviet interference. To be effective, U. S. strategy on the Angola question must refuse to be associated with South Africa as vigorously as it criticizes Soviet imperialism, and must support every attempt of the OAU to limit the scope of this conflict.

Ending the Peace Committee

The "request" of Chilean President Augusto Pinochet to Cardinal Raúl Silva that he disband the Cooperation for Peace in Chile Committee is another stain on the unenviable record of the military government that has ruled Chile for over two years. Founded within a month of the coup of September, 1973, the committee by the beginning of 1975 had aided in one way or another some 33,000 persons. It bought food for the families of those known to be political prisoners and others who had simply disappeared, applied (vainly) through its lawyers for writs of *habeas corpus*, verified and publicized cases of torture and murder by the security forces, tried to locate the arrested and the disappeared, appealed (vainly) for students expelled from the universities for their political beliefs and tried to find places in other countries for refugees. As unemployment increased in the wake of the government's economic