

A Boost For The FBI

HARRY and Bonaro Overstreet have written a book about the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which fact, standing alone, will raise no eyebrows on the far, far right. After all, didn't the Overstreets do a job on the John Birchers and the Liberty Lobbyists in their earlier work, *The Strange Tactics of Extremism*?

But what is this? The new book, entitled *The FBI in Our Open Society*, is friendly to the Bureau and its director, J. Edgar Hoover. It is more than friendly. It actually commends the Bureau. The left wing, the Overstreets conclude, has resorted to every imaginable distortion and intellectual dishonesty to portray the FBI as a threat to civil liberties. "We have not ourselves," the authors say, "found any sufficient reason to rate the present FBI as a police-state menace."

On the contrary. The Overstreets list case after case in which the FBI has, in the interest of civil liberties, requested limitations on its own authority — which surely must make the FBI unique within the bureaucratic establishment. In the 1930s, for example, Hoover asked the Justice Department *not* to support a law that

would have given the FBI almost unrestricted authority to install telephone wiretaps. So impressed was Morris Ernst, counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union and an impassioned FBI critic, that he checked the common leftist slanders against the evidence itself and published his findings in an article called "Why I No Longer Fear the FBI."

More recently, the FBI has resisted pressure from those who want the Bureau to compile a "blacklist" of potential presidential assassins. No one questions the need to protect the life of the President. But even this, Hoover told the Warren Commission, "ought to be handled in the American manner." House arrests, blacklists, and the like might make doubly sure the President comes to no harm. Yet that, said Hoover, is "what you would call totalitarian security."

The Overstreets, like Morris Ernst before them, have done an exacting and painstaking job of separating rumor from fact. The conclusion they reach is inescapable, though numerous sly defamers have managed to escape it: the FBI is one of the principal reasons our open society continues to exist.

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94-4-5366-192