

F.B.I. BURGLARIES SAID TO BE FOCUS OF MAJOR INQUIRY

Justice Dept.'s Nationwide
Investigation May Affect
Hundreds of Agents

MEN RETAINING COUNSEL

Investigators Reported to
Have Delved Into Secret
Files in 59 Field Offices

The following article was
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The Department of Justice is conducting a nationwide investigation of alleged illegal burglaries since 1971 by the Federal Bureau of Investigation that could ultimately involve hundreds of agents and officials of the bureau's intelligence division, according to well-placed F.B.I. sources.

At least a dozen agents, including an assistant director of the bureau, have retained private legal counsel because of the investigation. The inquiry is the broadest criminal investigation of the F.B.I. ever conducted, and one key agent said that it could result in changes in the fabric of the bureau "as it now exists."

The burglaries under investigation were allegedly performed by agents against organizations and individuals of the New Left, particularly members or supporters of the militant Weatherman organization, according to well-placed bureau sources.

Special Team Formed

The investigation is being conducted by William L. Gardner, chief of the criminal section of the civil rights division of the Department of Justice. He is assisted by a special team

of F.B.I. men under the direction of Richard Ash, the head of the bureau's identification division.

The inquiry was apparently begun after a civil suit brought against the F.B.I. and its officials by the Socialist Workers Party uncovered documents that indicated that surreptitious entries of the homes and offices of officials of the left had been made after 1971.

What has made the timing a sensitive factor is that the F.B.I. told the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities and the Ford Administration that it had no record of using burglary in domestic cases after 1966 when the director, the late J. Edgar Hoover, ordered the practice halted.

Clarence M. Kelley, the current director of the bureau, has consistently stated that the practice ended in 1966.

According to bureau sources, the current investigation has delved into heretofore secret files maintained in the 59 F.B.I. field offices, including the file of the special agent in charge, the file of the assistant special agent in charge, and a "do not file" file. These files were not searched when the Senate committee made its investigation last year and have no counterpart in Washington.

A Senate committee spokesman said that the F.B.I. had previously assured the panel that it had provided all available evidence relating to burglaries committed by its agents. The search of the field office files, ordered by Mr. Kelley last May 13, two weeks after the committee issued its final report, was undertaken in response to the Socialist Workers Party lawsuit.

One top Justice official has told newsmen privately that this belated disclosure "is beginning to give us all the shakes."

Bureau agents learned of the

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