

F.B.I. Tried to Kill Rev. King's Reputation

Officials of the Federal Bureau of Investigation have belatedly acknowledged in Senate testimony that for six years the agency harassed and tried to discredit Dr. Martin Luther King, a campaign for which the bureau had no legal authority. Although some of the incidents involved were known before, the testimony described a detailed picture of the counter-intelligence methods used against individuals or groups which the bureau deemed dangerous or offensive.

Bureau officials said the agency had kept the civil rights leader under electronic surveillance and sent him an anonymous threatening letter, which he and others took as an effort to induce him to commit suicide. The letter came with a recording in which Dr. King was supposedly sexually compromised. A similar tape was sent to Dr. King's wife.

The bureau also admitted that it tried to prevent Dr. King from receiving an honorary degree from a college, attempted to block his proposed meeting with the Pope, and sought to shut off the financial sources of his civil rights organization.

The persistent effort to discredit Dr. King was ostensibly motivated by a suspicion that the clergyman's organization was under Communist influence. The only evidence that the bureau had for that suspicion was the association with the organization of two persons whom the bureau had previously linked to the Communist Party. F.B.I. Director J. Edgar Hoover received field reports indicating that Dr. King posed no threat to national security, but the reports were rejected and some times ordered rewritten.

One possible explanation for the bureau's behavior was that Dr. King had angered Mr. Hoover by criticizing him for assigning conservative agents to Southern field offices responsible for investigating the murders of civil rights workers. Another possible explanation is a racist attitude on the part of Mr. Hoover. All the time, the F.B.I. had no black agents because he did not want them.

The Senate committee so far has not established with certainty how much was known by various Presidents about the bureau's counter-intelligence. In the case of Dr. King,

11-23-75
NYT

the agency asked the Justice Department for authority to investigate, but then apparently exceeded the authority that had been granted. The bureau received permission from Attorney General Robert Kennedy to place three wiretaps for a limited period; in fact, it placed 16 wiretaps and bugged eight rooms for an extended period.

The Attorney General evidently acquiesced in the taps initially because his brother, President Kennedy, had taken a political risk by supporting Dr. King. If the bureau's suspicions of Communist influence in Dr. King's organization been proven correct, the President could have been severely embarrassed.