

## Jack Anderson and Les Whitten

# Clash of Lawyers' Groups in 1950s

At the bottom of most Washington scandals, there invariably seems to be some lawyers in the woodpile.

The Watergate crimes were plotted initially at the Justice Department, with the Attorney General presiding and the White House counsel advising. Lawyers participated in the bag-jobs, forgeries, frame-ups, break-ins, cover-ups and perjury that followed.

Now we've learned that the bastion of legal ethics, the American Bar Association, conspired with the FBI to discredit the left-wing National Lawyers Guild. The FBI secretly wiretapped and spied on the guild's national offices and then fed derogatory information to key officials of the bar association.

The guild came under FBI surveillance not just because of its leftist leanings, but because of its opposition to racial discrimination, support of civil liberties and protests against congressional abuses. These stands offended the late FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover's standards for patriotism.

He grew up in Washington when it was still a small southern town, where segregation was the law as well as the custom. To Hoover, the struggle for equal rights by blacks smacked of rebellion. He was an incurable curmudgeon, conservative in his ways and narrow in his outlook, who saw sedition in dissent.

The American Bar Association should have had a more enlightened view of the nation's founding principles. Yet it not only joined in the Red-baiting of the 1950s but sought dirt about the Lawyers Guild from the

FBI. The sordid story has been buried for two decades in FBI files, which have now been made available to us.

The bar association's chief Communist hunter, Austin Canfield Sr., telephoned the FBI in January, 1952, to ask for information that could be used against the guild. A top FBI official, Louis B. Nichols, reported in a memo that Canfield "was in favor of taking . . . on" the guild.

Nichols then supplied Canfield with a report charging that the guild worked closely with Communist factions. As one piece of evidence, the report declared that the guild had blasted the FBI's "Gestapo activities," and attacked the ABA. Any criticism of the FBI was considered akin to treason.

One month later, Canfield made another call to the FBI, and Nichols again related the conversation in a confidential memo. "Canfield . . . stated . . . there will be . . . an attempt to move the American Bar Association into action against the National Lawyers Guild," reported Nichols. "He feels the . . . guild has now gone far enough and that now is the time to act."

The FBI, meanwhile, searched its "security index" for information about guild officers. Four memos were prepared, advised an FBI memo, which "may be of possible assistance to the American Bar Association."

As late as the 1960s, long after the Red scare had abated, the president-elect of the American Bar Association, John C. Satterfield, met with

Hoover to discuss "matters of mutual interest between the FBI and the ABA," according to a written account of the meeting.

Satterfield lavished praise upon the crusty FBI director and offered to do favors for him. Later Satterfield asked another FBI official for "background information" on the guild. Apparently, he planned to use the information to discredit guild members. For an FBI memo states:

"[Satterfield] would like to reinstitute this policy of not only barring members of the NLG from becoming members of the ABA but also expel from the ABA any attorney who continues to be associated with the NLG and fosters its aims."

FBI officials, with Hoover's permission noted with a terse "OK H," sent Satterfield a 24-page report on the National Lawyers Guild. This compared the Guild's positions with those of the Communist Party. The fact that both groups adopted the same line on the racial question and civil liberties, of course, didn't prove they were allied. The ABA ultimately balked at officially barring guild members.

Footnote: Satterfield conceded to our associate, Larry Kraftowitz, that he was "not in sympathy" with some of the guild's activities. But he said he couldn't remember discussing the guild with FBI officials. The FBI declined to comment because it is involved in litigation with the guild. The guild is suing the FBI for illegal surveillance and harassment.