Special IRS Unit Compiled List of 8,000 'Undesirables'

Post 10/4/75

Even lovers of rock music festivals were considered politically undesirable by the now-defunct Special Service Staff of the Internal Revenue Service.

According to evidence turned up by the Senate intelligence committee, the special IRS unit, organized in 1969, swept from right to left, culturally as well as politically, in compiling a target list of 8,000 individuals and 3,000 organizations looked upon with disfavor.

A memo that was apparently withheld from IRS Commissioner Donald Alexander for months following his appointment in 1973 gave some hint of the standards that were used to outline the SSS's "origin, mission and potential."

It suggested close IRS scrutiny not only of "violent groups" by a wide range of others, including people who "aid in funding sale of firearms to Irish Republican Army" and even those who "organize and attend rock festivals which attack youth and narcotics."

Still others who somehow wound up on the target list — presumably for something they once said or did — included then-Mayor John V. Lindsay of New York, writer Jimmy Breslin, commentator Joseph Alsop, and the Conservative Book Club.

Alexander said he abolished the SSS in August, 1973, immediately upon learning of the memo suggesting the checkups on rock festival audiences. He termed the proposal "antithetical to our job, as was the rest of the memo."

He said at a Senate committee hearing this week that he had no idea why many of the other names were put on the target list.

Sen. Walter D. Huddleston (D-Ky.) made plain that inclusion on this or other IRS "lists" was much more than simply a badge of disfavor that could be safely ignored.

According to evidence compiled by committee investigators, Huddleston said, anyone on an IRS target list ran a 50 per cent risk of having his or her tax returns audited.