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freedom of
FOI
information

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ONE MAN vs. one GOVERNMENT

Harold Weisberg, a Maryland farmer, was caught up in the sweeping anti-communist movement of the first half of the 20th century.

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FREDERICK — For decades, the most powerful domestic intelligence agency in the United States watched a Maryland chicken farmer.

For decades, the Federal Bureau of Investigation wrote analyses of his public statements, books and newspaper articles.

For decades, the FBI's highest-ranking intelligence officials, including its legendary and controversial director, J. Edgar Hoover, personally exchanged correspondence on his life, which was spent investigating the veracity of the government's conclusions on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

The Frederick News-Post has obtained the FBI files of Harold Weisberg — local author, farmer and noted expert on assassinations — through the Freedom of Information Act.

Mr. Weisberg, who died in 2002 at his home just outside Frederick, has a 178-page file. The newspaper will appeal the government's decision to withhold 39 pages.

Mr. Weisberg gained notoriety for his books criticizing the FBI and Warren Commission for their investigations of JFK's assassination, and he is well known for his extensive collection of government files and information,

now housed in a library at Hood College.

However, the FBI looked into Mr. Weisberg long before he published his first book in 1965.

In 1939, Mr. Weisberg jeopardized government security by leaking information to a communist newspaper, *The Daily Worker*, and harboring subversive ideological sympathies, the FBI file states.

Throughout the years, government documents contain frequent attacks on the author's character, describing him as a miscreant with delusions of conspiracy.

As Mr. Weisberg's efforts to obtain information for his books continued from the 1960s onward, the FBI tried to obstruct his work. The FBI ignored

INSIDE

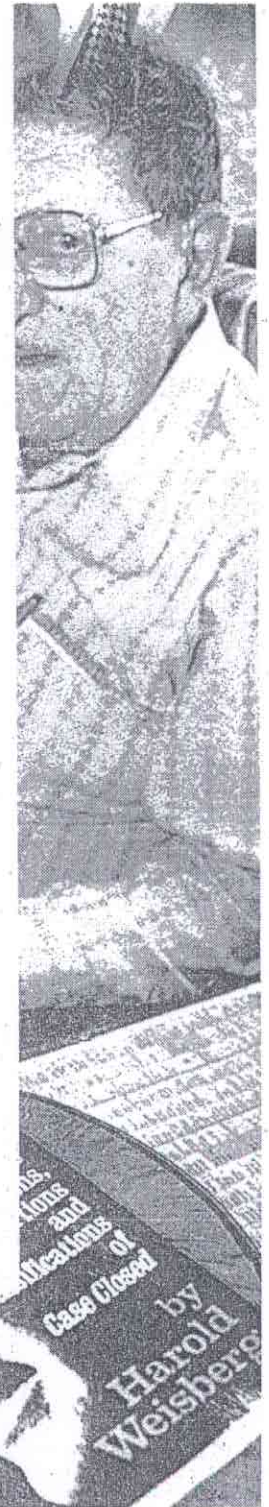
- **DOCUMENTS:** Look at a page from the FBI file
- **CHARACTERS:** Get an overview of characters involved
- **WEB:** Find out where to go for more information

(See WEISBERG A-7)

COMING MONDAY

Although Harold Weisberg started a new life chicken-farming in Maryland after being fired from the State Department in 1947, his trials with the government and the FBI were just beginning. On Monday, The Frederick News-Post will detail:

- The FBI's investigation into Mr. Weisberg's alleged communist beliefs
- The FBI concealing information on President John F. Kennedy's assassination
- Mr. Weisberg's criticism of the FBI and other government agencies



December 12, 1947

HAROLD WEISBERG

The Louisville Division advised on August 9, 1938, that in the year 1938 Harold Weisberg was connected with the Committee on Education and Labor, United States Senate, and was in Harlan, Kentucky, during the trial of United States versus Mary Helen Coal Corporation, et al - Civil Rights and Domestic Violence. (44-175-348)

b7C In March, 1940, when Harold Weisberg was interviewed in connection with an official investigation, he stated that he was employed by the LaFollette Civil Liberties Committee until June, 1939, and thereafter did special research work for the Dies Committee. (61-7587-624; Statement furnished by Harold Weisberg to Special Agents [redacted] Washington Field Division.)

b7C [redacted] to the State Department, advised on May 8, 1940 that Harold Weisberg was the Washington correspondent of the magazine "Friday" published in New York City. He was the author

This summary from 1947 outlines the first FBI contact with Harold Weisberg, while he was an editor for the LaFollette Civil Liberties Committee.

his requests for material even after the passage of the Freedom of Information Act in 1966, culminating in a 1970 memorandum from Mr. Hoover to a deputy assistant attorney general instructing that no information be given to Mr. Weisberg.

"In view of Weisberg's character, he should not be given the information he requests, and there is legal ground for our position," Mr. Hoover's memo states.

For decades, Mr. Weisberg was watching the government. And for decades, it was watching him back.

In part one of a two-part investigation into the confrontational history between Mr. Weisberg and the FBI, *The Frederick News-Post* will examine his early government career.

These conflicts established the groundwork for the FBI's later accusations that Mr. Weisberg was a communist and deserved to be denied access to information about JFK's assassination.

In part two on Monday, the newspaper will explore the details of the historian's battles for government transparency. Part two will also look into the growing FBI case against Mr. Weisberg's supposed political beliefs and how they played a significant role when he was trying to find out the truth about President Kennedy's assassination.

Although the FBI's efforts would escalate after Mr. Weisberg began publishing his books, the roots of his FBI file go back to some of the earliest moments of the nation's anti-communist fervor.

Mr. Weisberg was not only a later victim of the Cold War ethos; he was also an early casualty.

The New World

As the torrents of immigrants into the United States continued in the early 20th century, the waves of western Europeans were replaced by eastern Europeans, who in turn became the new victims of not only anti-immigration ideology but also virulent anti-Semitism and anti-communism.

Mr. Weisberg was part of this changing society as the son of two Jewish immigrants from Russia. He was born on April 8, 1913, in a working-class neighborhood in Philadelphia.

"I'm the first member of my family, as I've thought often in recent years, ever born into freedom, going back as far as Adam and Eve."

Harold Weisberg

In a 1993 interview with Joy Derr of Hood College, Mr. Weisberg remarked how significant his birth in America was.

"I'm the first member of my family, as I've thought often in recent years, ever born into freedom, going back as far as Adam and Eve," he said.

Friends of the writer believe that his family's background was an influential component in formulating his faith in America's promise and ideals.

"He, being a first-generation American, was extremely patriotic," said Clayton Ogilvie, a friend and caretaker of Mr. Weisberg's archives. "His patriotic fervor was based on his parents telling him stories of the old country."

After high school, Mr. Weisberg worked as a reporter for the *Wilmington Morning News* and the *Philadelphia Ledger*, and he studied at the University of Delaware in Newark before dropping out when his father died.

Mr. Weisberg then went to work for the government.

Leak Allegations

According to the FBI file, Mr. Weisberg's first position with the government was on the U.S. Committee on Education and Labor, also known as the LaFollette Civil Liberties Committee, headed by U.S. Sen. Robert M. LaFollette, Jr., of Wisconsin.

The committee was created during President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal as part of a National Labor Relations Board inquiry into attempts by businesses to disrupt unions. At the time, labor reform efforts were increasingly seen as tantamount to communism.

Mr. Weisberg began working for the committee in September 1936 and was stationed in Harlan, Ky., known as "Bloody Harlan" for its violence, to investigate the efforts of coal mine owners to dismantle labor's strength. In the 1993 interview, he told Ms. Derr he was "deep" into the region's corporate corruption and violence.

Mr. Weisberg's activity attracted the attention of the Louisville division of the FBI, according to a December 1947 summary of Mr. Weisberg's activities.

Although FBI files from the late 1940s indicate Mr. Weisberg ceased working for Mr. LaFollette in June 1939, the reason for his dismissal was not established until the mid-1960s, following the publication of his first book, which was critical of the FBI.

In a June 6, 1966 memo from Alex Rosen, the FBI assistant director of the general investigative division, to Cartha "Deke" DeLoach, the assistant to the director in charge of investigations, Mr. LaFollette fired Mr. Weisberg for leaking information to *The Daily Worker*, the foremost communist newspaper in America.

Neither the specific allegations nor

accuser was established until more than 25 years after the fact.

Until the Rosen-DeLoach memo, FBI files only identified Mr. Weisberg an editor of committee publications by a "reliable source of information" who knew him from 1936 to 1937 and "was of the opinion that Mr. Weisberg was at least a communist sympathizer, but probably was closer than that to the Party."

Labor Problems

During the period that Mr. Weisberg was in Harlan, Martin Dies, a Texas Democrat in the House of Representatives, got a resolution passed on May 26, 1938 to create the Dies Committee.

Although ostensibly created to focus on German-American activities in American Nazi organizations and the Ku Klux Klan, the committee was actually the forerunner to the House Un-American Activities Committee. It spent its time looking for communist sympathizers in New Deal groups such as the Federal Theatre Project.

According to the FBI files, in March 1940, Mr. Weisberg told officials that, following his dismissal from the LaFollette Committee, he conducted "special research" for the Dies Committee. No specific chronology of his work is available in the FBI file.

The reason why a government body that evolved into a group synonymous with anti-communism would hire someone who had spent three years investigating on the side of labor and allegedly leaking information to the very people Mr. Dies was trying to destroy is unclear, from both the FBI files and past interviews with Mr. Weisberg himself.

"That does make it rather counterintuitive," said Gerald McKnight, emeritus professor of history at Hood and a friend of Mr. Weisberg's for 30 years.

According to the book "The Committee: The Extraordinary Career of the House Committee on Un-American Activities" by politics and ethics writer Walter Goodman, Mr. Dies had been actively trying to disrupt the LaFollette Committee with a proposal of an investigation into sit-down strikes "frankly designed to counteract" its work, which extended into 1941.

In Mr. Goodman's book, Mr. Weisberg was recruited by Gardner Jackson, a legislative representative of the pro-labor group Labor's Non-Partisan League, in an effort to uncover allegations that Mr. Dies had made a secret agreement with right-wing groups that any investigations would focus on left-leaning groups or individuals.

According to Mr. Goodman, DAVID Mayne, a Washington representative of the fascist group Silver Shirts, founded by William Dudley Pelley, sold forged letters indicating a conspiracy between Mr. Dies and Mr. Pelley. Mr. Weisberg, on instructions from Mr. Jackson, bought these letters for \$105.

Mr. Mayne, who eventually confessed to forging the letters in an attempt to trap anyone out to get Mr. Dies, was brought to trial, pleaded guilty and received a suspended sentence.

This event is referenced in a letter Mr. Weisberg wrote to someone named "Cameron" on March 14, 1940, in which he wrote he can send information about the "Mayne-entrapment story."

If he was actively trying to obtain dire information about the Dies Committee while working for it, no information definitively indicates he was working as a double agent. The FBI reported on his activities in Harlan in 1936 but the files indicate Mr. Weisberg was not being studied until the investigation in March 1940.

Mr. Ogilvie said Mr. Weisberg knew about bribery and misconduct among committee officials.

"He found corruption within the Dies Committee," he said, adding that Mr. Weisberg was brought before a grand jury and made a scapegoat for his work. "They knew they were being subject to scrutiny they couldn't afford."

Mr. McKnight was also aware of these events, and said Lillian, Mr. Weisberg's wife and a worker in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, alerted her husband to the coming problem when she saw his name in a memo.

"His work in Harlan got the attention of the Dies Committee," Mr. McKnight said. "(Mr.) Dies would not have any problem with union leaders being blown up in their homes."

In one of the 1993 interviews with Ms. Derr, Mr. Weisberg alluded to a confrontation with the Dies Committee.

"They framed me. It was a hell of a fight," he said. "I won ... I took the grand

jury away from the United States attorney and I got the Dies agent indicted on two felony charges. That was an experience like you can't imagine."

Following Mr. Weisberg's strange role with the Dies Committee, the FBI files indicate he worked for two magazines, Click and Friday as its Washington correspondent. While with Friday, Mr. Weisberg wrote an article critical of Assistant Secretary of State Adolf A. Berle Jr. in 1940.

Mr. Weisberg told Ms. Derr that much of his reporting work centered on uncovering the business of Nazi cartels. The FBI took notice, mentioning his 1941 Click article about a Czech shoe manufacturer entitled "Hitler's Foot Soldier."

The FBI also noted, "one Harold Weisberg was connected with the offices of Congressman Vito Marcantonio," a politician noted for his radical leftist politics. The FBI's summary states, "it is not known if this individual is identical with the subject of this memorandum."

Mr. Weisberg did have contact with the congressman, according to those who knew him.

"They were good social friends," Mr. McKnight said. "That's all (Mr.) Hoover would need to know."

From Dec. 18, 1942 to Nov. 17, 1944, Mr. Weisberg served in the U.S. Army. He did not see combat because he came down with mumps.

But very little of this information surfaces on FBI memos actually dated for this time period. It was not until Mr. Weisberg was again fired from a government agency, this time the State Department, for being an alleged communist, that the FBI began its prolonged interest in his activities.

Postwar Paranoia

"The United States was trying, in the postwar decade, to create a national consensus—excluding the radicals, who could not support a foreign policy aimed at suppressing revolution—of conservatives and liberals, Republicans and Democrats, around the policies of cold war and anti-Communism," writes historian Howard Zinn in "A People's History of the United States."

One of the marked results of the worries over domestic subversion was the FBI's move toward investigations of political ideology, particularly among government workers. Immunity for government employees did not exist on any level, and Mr. Weisberg was caught up in the purges of suspected communists in government positions.

In a recent interview with *The Frederick News-Post*, Mr. DeLoach said the FBI's inquiries into the Communist Party were necessary. Once the priorities of the FBI shifted from working on crime to intelligence gathering and espionage during World War II, investigating communists was a natural part of the FBI's missions, he said.

"The Communist Party, today, people think, is a futile organization," he said.

"(Mr.) Dies would not have any problems with union leaders being blown up in their homes"

Gerald McKnight

"The Soviets viewed it as an excellent propaganda and espionage tool."

As an example, Mr. DeLoach pointed to the FBI's "Solo Case," which detailed the attempts of Soviet officials to buy influence in America's Communist Party for millions of dollars.

Mr. DeLoach emphasized every case on suspected communists was opened for good reasons, and the FBI informants were of good quality.

"Our purpose was to investigate and report to the attorney general and the president of the United States. We didn't decide the principals," he said. "In order to protect the best interests of the United States, it was absolutely necessary to investigate communism."

On March 24, 1947, President Harry Truman issued Executive Order No. 9835, establishing the Federal Employees Loyalty and Security Program.

In "Truman," historian David McCullough details how the president was pressured into this decision by the elections of

1946, in which Republicans had successfully campaigned on a platform of sniffing out communists. Mr. Truman hoped an executive initiative could blunt the overzealous factions in government.

"Importantly, he wanted no accusations of administration softness on communism at home just as he was calling for a new hard approach to communism abroad," Mr. McCullough wrote.

Under the program, 212 government employees were fired. Harold Weisberg was one of them.

Anti-Government or Anti-Semitic?

Beginning in March 1946, Mr. Weisberg, despite being an alleged political dissident and informant, was hired by the Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner to the Central Intelligence Agency.

According to the FBI, he worked in the research and analysis branch for the Latin American division.

Mr. McKnight said a difference in security culture between then and now, as well as the lack of truth to Mr. Weisberg's communist leanings, were probably the reasons a suspected communist was able to receive a job dealing with highly sensitive information.

"I don't think people were as wrapped up in security as they are today," he said. "I think if he were a stand-up card-carrying member, he wouldn't have gotten into security matters."

But it did not take long for the federal government to become suspicious of Mr. Weisberg.

On Nov. 26, 1946, months before Mr. Truman's loyalty program started, the State Department began its own inquiry into Mr. Weisberg, running a neighborhood investigation, reference checks, and, most tellingly, a review of the Dies Committee reports and Committee on Un-American Activities information.

Soon afterward, the State Department brought in the FBI, which said he was a friend and contact for people under investigation in the Nathan Gregory Silvermaster case.

The Silvermaster, or "Gregory" case, was an investigation into a Soviet spy ring in the Department of Treasury. The FBI does not give any further elaboration regarding Mr. Weisberg's association with the Silvermaster case, despite repeating the claim in multiple FBI memos.

After a seven-month investigation, Mr. Weisberg and nine other employees were dismissed on June 23, 1947, under the McCarran Rider, which authorized the Secretary of State to terminate any employee when it would be in the best interests of the United States.

"Files of another Government agency reflect that Harold Weisberg was dismissed from the Department of State because of indirect association with representatives of foreign powers," according to a National security Agency memo dated Nov. 5, 1956.

Mr. Weisberg's communist sympathies are only definitively described in FBI documents following his dismissal from the State Department, and allegations against him continually expand as he becomes a high-profile critic of the FBI in the 1960s.

It cannot be answered why Mr. Weisberg's communist sympathies were not detailed earlier, and the knowledge gap lends credibility to any claims the FBI only set about looking for its evidence after it had decided the conclusion.

Both Mr. Ogilvie and David Wrone, history professor emeritus from University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and a friend of Mr. Weisberg's, believe anti-Semitism had more to do with his firing from the State Department than communism.

"(The employees) were Jews...it was an anti-Semitic thing," Mr. Wrone said. "Harold Weisberg was not a communist by any means. It was a political maneuver, so they tried to make them look like communists."

Because of his politics and dealings with labor, Mr. Weisberg inevitably knew communists, Mr. McKnight said, but there is a difference between those interactions and collusion.

"I don't doubt that Harold socialized (with communists), but he was never a

card-carrying member," he said. "But it didn't matter in those days."

After a legal battle, Mr. Weisberg and his dismissed colleagues were allowed to resign from the State Department without any record against them in November 1947.

Mr. Weisberg's file contains a letter from his attorneys, several of whom played large parts in Roosevelt's administration and the New Deal — Thurman Arnold, Abe Fortas, Paul A. Porter and Milton V. Freeman. The letter thanks Mr. Weisberg for a gift he had sent.

"You know it was a pleasure to be of service to you and your own calmness and dignity under the most adverse circumstances were in no small measure responsible for your ultimate vindication," the letter states.

But in the FBI files, Mr. Weisberg was anything but vindicated.

ON THE WEB

■ www.fredericknewspost.com

For more information on Harold Weisberg, including audio files, entire FBI documents, specifics on Freedom of

Information laws and a look at the Weisberg Archives, visit The Frederick News-Post Web site.

CHARACTERS

The following people were involved in the creation of documents or in the events surrounding the FBI examination of Harold Weisberg from 1938 to 1978.



★ **J. EDGAR HOOVER**

— legendary and controversial FBI director from 1924 to 1972. Mr. Hoover was noted for his obsession with

attacking and spying on "subversive" American citizens

★ **ROBERT M. LAFOLLETTE JR.** — Wisconsin senator who ran the LaFollette Civil Liberties Committee, investigating unfair labor practices

★ **CARTHA "DEKE" DELOACH** — FBI

assistant director in charge of crime records division, 1959-1965; assistant to the director in charge of investigations (No. 3 position



in bureau), 1965-1970. Involved in many of the memos concerning Mr. Weisberg, particularly the ones dealing with books and public statements

★ **ALEX ROSEN** — former FBI assistant director of general investigative division

★ **PATRICK MCCARRAN** — Nevada Senator known for his strong anti-Communist stance, and responsible for the McCarran Rider, which allowed government to fire employees if doing so would be in the interests of the U.S.

★ **VITO MARCANTONIO** — radical politician from New York who served in the House of Representatives as a member of the American Labor Party



★ **MARTIN DIES** — Texas Democrat in the House of Representatives who created the Dies Committee, the forerunner to the House Un-American

Activities Committee

★ **NATHAN GREGORY SILVERMASTER**

— senior official in the Department of the Treasury; identified by the FBI as a Soviet spy

★ **HARRY DEXTER WHITE** — senior official in the Department of the Treasury, and associate of Mr. Silvermaster; later identified as a Soviet spy by the FBI

★ **GARDNER JACKSON** — legislative representative of Labor's Non-Partisan League

★ **WILLIAM DUDLEY PELLEY** — founder of the Silver Shirts, a fascist and anti-Semitic organization



★ **DAVID MAYNE** — Mr. Pelley's Washington representative

★ **HARRY S. TRUMAN** — president of the United States from 1945-53



★ **EARL WARREN** — United States Supreme Court chief justice who chaired the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, known as the Warren Commission

★ **JOHN F. KENNEDY** — president of the United States from January 1961 to Nov. 22, 1963, when he was assassinated in Dallas

★ **LEE HARVEY OSWALD** — accused assassin of JFK, killed in Dallas by Jack Ruby before he could stand trial

