

Anti-Dissident Program at Issue

FBI Chief, Saxbe Disagree

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FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley and his immediate superior, Attorney General William B. Saxbe, disagreed yesterday over the wisdom and legality of FBI counterintelligence projects directed against domestic dissidents between 1956 and 1971.

The disagreement surfaced at a joint press conference at the Justice Department, where Saxbe released a report criticizing some methods used by the FBI to disrupt activist groups, including the South-

ern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Congress on Racial Equality, as well as extremist groups.

The report, prepared by a joint FBI-Criminal Division committee headed by Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen, termed some FBI activities "practices that can only be considered abhorrent in a free society."

But Kelley said the counterintelligence measures "helped bring about a favorable change" and that failure to disrupt "violence-prone groups" would have been an abdication of the FBI's

"responsibilities to the American people."

Kelley's comments came in a five-page statement handed reporters at the close of the press conference, at which Saxbe termed disruption of political groups "not something which we in a free society should condone."

In response to a reporter's question, Kelley said he could envision future situations in which similar disruption of radical groups might be necessary. He said the FBI favors legislation to permit domestic

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counterintelligence actions in emergencies.

Under its top-secret program, which the FBI called Cointelpro, a variety of disruptive methods were used including planting false information inside groups, or with "friendly media" and employers; using FBI informers to disrupt groups, and creating the suspicion that bona fide group members might be police spies.

But the Attorney General said he could foresee no situation to justify Cointelpro type activities.

Asked whether there was a difference of opinion between himself and Kelley, Saxbe said pointedly, "Yes, but Mr. Kelley also recognizes in our dealings that this is a policy decision that would have to come from the Attorney General."

Saxbe also said he did not think legislation to prohibit domestic counterintelligence was necessary.

Kelley and Saxbe also disagreed over whether the projects had the approval of higher officials.

Kelley said he had conducted his own study, which convinced him that "the FBI officials involved in these programs acted entirely in good faith and within the bounds of what was expected of them by the President, the Attorney General, the Congress and the American people."

According to Petersen's report, the first Cointelpro be-

gan in 1956 as a means of disrupting the Communist Party. Projects were later directed against the Socialist Workers Party, and other black or white radical political groups. In all, 2,370 counterintelligence operations eventually were approved. Kelley said all such projects proved.

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover initiated all such projects and terminated them on April 26, 1971, after some Cointelpros were disclosed in documents stolen from the FBI office at Media, Pa.

According to Kelley, Hoover first informed then-Attorney General William P. Rogers about disruptive counter intelligence operations directed against "a revolutionary organization," presumably the Communist Party, in 1958.

Later, Kelley said, Attorneys General were briefed on Cointelpro projects against far-right groups in 1961, 1963, 1967, and 1969.

However, Saxbe told reporters that knowledge of counterintelligence operations by officials outside the FBI was "fragmentary." Petersen's report indicated that "only certain aspects" of the counterintelligence operations were disclosed to higher officials, and that "none of the activities so reported involved any improper conduct."

According to Petersen, all seven categories of Cointelpro projects were specifically authorized by Hoover, but

"apparently not reported to any of the Attorneys General during the periods in which they were implemented."

The "overwhelming bulk" of Cointelpro activities "were clearly legitimate and proper undertakings," Petersen's report concluded.

Officials said New Left groups targeted by the FBI beginning in 1968 were Students for a Democratic Society, the Progressive Labor Party, the Weathermen, and the Young Socialist Alliance.

Black groups subjected to counterintelligence projects from 1967 to 1971 were CORE, SCLC, the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Black Panther Party, the Revolutionary Action Movement, and the Nation of Islam.

Radical right groups, beginning in 1964, included various Ku Klux Klan organizations, the Minutemen, the American Nazi Party, and the National States Rights Party. In five cases, the FBI set up sham organizations to disrupt "white hate groups," the report noted.