

Intelligence Work and the District Police

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THE FIRST THING that needs to be said about recent stories concerning the Metropolitan Police Department and intelligence work is that intelligence—properly collected, evaluated, stored and used—is vital to a police department. Not only does intelligence help to prevent and solve crimes, but it also helps a police chief to make informed deployments of his force. The lack of good intelligence has often hampered police work in this country and the shortcomings of local police forces in this regard were pointed out in the 1960s by two different presidential commissions. Good intelligence work also has a positive side; one of the tasks assigned to the intelligence unit of the Metropolitan Police in the 1960s, according to Chief Cullinane, was the compilation of a list of 200 community leaders who, in future disturbances, could influence others to try to restore calm to the city.

The misuse of the intelligence process, however, in any of its phases, constitutes substantial threat to the civil liberties of every citizen and to the principles of democratic government. The problem of intelligence work, be it done by the local police department or the CIA, is to achieve its legitimate goals without crossing into areas where the government should not be. The police, for instance, should not be watching citizens unless there is very strong reason to believe they have committed or are about to commit crimes. The police should not be keeping files on individuals except regarding past or potential criminal activity. The police should not be directing their efforts at political groups. In those instances in which the local police department did these things, it must be sharply faulted.

Principles like these are, of course, easier to set forth than they are to follow. And the task was made much more difficult in the past decade by demonstrations and other political activities in which groups that used threats and the rhetoric of violence joined with those that did not. It was also made much more difficult by the perceptions held by various high officials of the dangers posed by various groups and demonstrations.

It seems clear from Chief Cullinane's report that somewhere during this time the activities of the Metropolitan Police Department began to go seriously awry. Otherwise, he would not have found it necessary to order the destruction of vast numbers of files and to issue a new order clarifying the ways in which various categories of intelligence are to be gathered and stored. Indeed, a major problem for anyone trying to pass judgment on what the Department did in the past is the fact that much of what it did has already been destroyed. So, with one exception, it is probably more useful to look forward in terms of what Chief Cullinane

is now trying to accomplish than to look backward at what has now been stopped. That exception involves the relationships between the Metropolitan Police Department and the CIA and the Army. The police accepted \$150,000 from the Army to fund its undercover intelligence work during a period in which Army leaders believed military forces might again be brought into the city and they needed intelligence to prepare for that possibility. Given the exigencies of the situation, we can understand how the police accepted the money, although it would be highly preferable if such work were funded from the civilian side of government as it should be. As to the CIA, we think it is possible to overestimate the importance of the fact that the police borrowed equipment from the CIA and utilized CIA training facilities—although we do question the instance in which CIA personnel were used during a demonstration.

The new directive on intelligence operations issued two weeks ago by Assistant Chief Zanders should go a long way toward eliminating some of the things the department did in the past that it clearly should not have done. This directive bars the creation of files on individuals except when there is a direct connection with law violations, recorded or strongly suspected. It directs the destruction of files on demonstrations or public gatherings once the meeting has occurred unless there have been law violations. And it provides for a systematic review of all intelligence files and the destruction of those no longer needed. It is worth noting in this regard that the activities of the police intelligence unit now, according to Chief Cullinane's figures, are almost exclusively focused on clearly criminal behavior. The shift away from a focus on demonstrations or, to be more precise, the peace movement began a couple of years ago.

There will be, no doubt, trouble again sometime in the future with police intelligence operations. Some officer will become too curious about the life of some particular citizen, some ranking District or federal official will order the police to get into areas where the police do not belong, or, with the passage of time, some of the lessons learned from the last decade will be forgotten. But, it seems to us, Chief Cullinane is in the process of getting the police department off the wrong road and channelling its intelligence efforts into places where they can be more productive and less troublesome. The real test is whether the community pays enough attention to make sure that shift is completed and, once completed, maintained.