

Ex-Operative Says He Worked for F.B.I.

By JOHN M. CREWDSON
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to Disrupt Political Activities

WASHINGTON, Feb. 23 — Despite assurances by the Justice Department that the Federal Bureau of Investigation's controversial Counterintelligence Program was halted in April, 1971, a former undercover operative says that the bureau continued as late as last June to employ program-style techniques against domestic political groups.

The former operative, Joseph A. Burton, told The New York Times in a series of recent interviews of activities he carried out for the F.B.I. that appear similar to several of the categories of "dirty tricks" that characterized the Counterintelligence Program, or Cointelpro, effort.

Mr. Burton's account included examples of bogus documents, informants and sham "revolutionary" front groups used to disrupt a variety of political activities in this country.

He also told of "infiltrating" labor unions and, with other F.B.I. undercover operatives, of reporting to the F.B.I. on the Republican National Convention at Miami Beach in 1972, and of encouraging and assisting demonstrations against the Nixon Administration over the Watergate scandals.

F.B.I. Challenges Assertions

An F.B.I. spokesman termed many of Mr. Burton's allegations "distorted or false" in a statement issued today.

The spokesman reiterated that the bureau's "Cointelpro" effort had not continued beyond April, 1971, and maintained that the F.B.I. had not instructed Mr. Burton to join or report on any labor unions and had no knowledge of his involvement in any "violent" demonstrations during the Miami convention.

Cointelpro's operation is expected to be investigated by the select committees that the Senate and House of Representatives have recently set up to examine intelligence gathering by Federal agencies.

Cointelpro was described in a report by the Justice Department last November as a 17-year attempt to disrupt, expose or neutralize such organizations as the Communist party and the Ku Klux Klan.

In making the Cointelpro report public, William B. Saxbe, then the Attorney General, disclosed that such activities "were implemented at various times during the period from 1956 to 1971, when all pro-

grams were discontinued."

No Renewal Asked

Mr. Saxbe, who became Ambassador to India earlier this month, said that during his tenure as Attorney General he had not been asked to consider the reinstatement of any Counterintelligence Programs against domestic groups and could foresee no circumstances under which he would do so.

He also pointed out that Clarence M. Kelley, the F.B.I. director, cautioned his agents in December, 1973, when the existence of Cointelpro was made public, that they must not "engage in any investigative activity which could abridge in any way" the constitutional rights of American citizens.

In a subsequent speech to Duke University law students, Mr. Kelley affirmed that he would not direct the bureau to enter into domestic counterintelligence efforts without first consulting the Attorney General and the President.

Mr. Burton, who lives in Tampa, Fla., said that he and other undercover intelligence agents operated bogus "Communist" organizations, set up with the assistance of the F.B.I., to help them gain a foothold with radicals in their communities and with other revolutionary groups around the country.

Formed Red Star Group

For more than two years, Mr. Burton headed the "Red Star Cadre," ostensibly a pro-Communist Chinese organization that he said he formed in May, 1972, "at the direction of the bureau," and directed until he left the bureau's employ in July, 1974.

The F.B.I., he said, supplied him with everything from the name to operating funds to T-shirts, bearing a large red star and the legend "Fight Back,"

that he and his radical comrades wore to demonstrations.

Mr. Burton, a 42-year-old auctioneer and antique dealer, said he became involved with the F.B.I. after he was invited by a co-worker at a Tampa janitorial service to join the Communist party.

Mr. Burton said he advised the F.B.I.'s Tampa field office of the invitation and was visited the next day by two agents, who persuaded him to adopt a revolutionary guise and to try to infiltrate radical groups in the Tampa area. He said he was later asked to infiltrate other groups in the United States and Canada.

The function of the Red Star Cadre, he said, was to "make other organizations come to us and want to discuss ideology."

Attracted Members

He was successful in this, he said, as well as in attracting as members of his cadre a number of local radicals in whom the F.B.I. was interested.

Mr. Burton said he was later told by the F.B.I. that his efforts in Tampa were part of a larger attempt by the bureau to find and cut off funds believed to be flowing to Maoist groups in this country from China.

To provide a headquarters for the cadre, Mr. Burton said, he opened a junk store, the Red Star Swap Shop, for which the F.B.I. provided half the overhead expenses while allowing him to keep the profits it produced.

The shop quickly became a gathering place for radicals in Tampa, Mr. Burton said, and he was soon reporting to the bureau not only on the cadre membership, which at its peak numbered less than 20, but also on anyone who ventured into the store, "even if they came in to buy."

At one point, he said, the F.B.I. approached him with a plan to conceal recording and filming equipment in the store's air-conditioning system. He said he rejected the proposal because, if the equipment was discovered, it might "get me killed."

Sent to Miami Beach

As the fledgling Tampa

Up to '74

group became known to other radical organizations around the country, Mr. Burton said he was called upon by the bureau to leave the city in connection with his work.

His first out-of-town assignment, he said, was to "cover" the demonstrations at the Republican National Convention in 1972 in Miami Beach, where he and other Red Star members traveled at the F.B.I.'s expense.

While his "comrades" protested or slept in a large tent in Flamingo Park, also paid for by the agency, Mr. Burton said he slipped away to telephone periodic reports to the bureau's Miami office.

During one report, he said, the Miami agents "suggested that I try to get into one of the 'affinity groups' which ended up later 'trashing' the taxicabs' around the convention site."

But he said he demurred on the ground that "the type of Left philosophy that I was expounding at that time would not have condoned my doing that."

"The only thing I helped to do," he said, "was incite people to turn over one of the buses and then told them that if they really wanted to blow the bus up, to stick a rag in the gas tank and light it."

The protesters, he said, were unable to overturn the vehicle.

'Sense of Importance'

Asked why he had agreed to undertake such tasks in return for relatively little money or security, Mr. Burton, who never graduated from high school, replied:

"Most people work in intelligence because it gives you a sense of importance, a sense of being worthwhile and doing something worthwhile instead of mopping floors."

"I felt like, being the person that I am, the social position that I'm in, the educational background and everything, that this was something I could give to my country."

The experiences that followed the Miami trip, however, according to Mr. Burton, led gradually to frustration and, finally, to concern about the legality and propriety of what he and

others were doing in the bureau's behalf.

"When the F.B.I. came to me," he said, "I felt honored, the most trusted person in town. After I got to know them a little closer, I said, 'We got a monster running around in this country.' I hate to say that, but that's the way I feel about it."

Opposed Disruption

"I don't see anything wrong with gleaning intelligence, but I do see it with setting up an espionage agency in order to glean that intelligence and, at the same time, to do disruptive, disorganizing types of things."

Mr. Burton conceded that "I don't like the left."

"The real solution to the left," he went on, "is to solve our social problems in the country, and then the left has no inroad. But until we can do that, then I think we should operate under the law."

He said, he had not yet received a reply to a letter he addressed last month to Mr. Kelley, the F.B.I. director, asking for some assurance that his bureau-directed activities "both inside and outside" of the country were "legal and proper and within the . . . jurisdiction of the F.B.I."

Asked about the validity of Mr. Burton's concern, Nick F. Stames, the former head of the F.B.I.'s Tampa office, declined to make any specific comment on Mr. Burton's account.

Mr. Stames, who has recently been promoted to head the bureau's Washington field office, did say that Mr. Burton had done "an outstanding job when he was under our control," and that, to the F.B.I.'s knowledge, he had not engaged in any illegal activities.

Not Bring Them Together

Mr. Burton said his general instructions from the bureau could be characterized as "do not ever do anything that will bring Marxist-Leninists together in any way, do anything to prevent them from coming together."

One element of this, he went on, was to impose "a financial, economic drain on them, keep draining them for everything you can get."

In this connection, he said he set about ordering vast quantities of revolutionary literature, ostensibly for redistribution in Florida, from other pro-Chinese groups around the country.

Little of the material was



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Joseph A. Burton

ever passed out, he said, but the bureau continued to direct him to order it by the crate, "just because it was hurting the organization to produce the printing," or because it was "hurting the Chinese to ship it to them."

Mr. Burton said, however, that some of the materials he distributed were printed not by leftist organizations or by the Chinese Government but by the F.B.I.

He produced one document that he said had been approved by F.B.I. headquarters in Washington, printed by the bureau and mailed to a number of Marxist-Leninist "collectives" around the country.

He said the intent of the document, which contained a number of unfounded accusations, were to undermine an incipient move by independent collectives to unite as the "Organization of United States Marxist-Leninists."

"In the F.B.I.'s files there is a report," Mr. Burton said, that credits the bogus document with "breaking up that organization."

On another occasion, he said, he was told that intelligence specialists at F.B.I. headquarters "thought it would be a good idea if we put out a newspaper here."

In addition to serving as a vehicle for propaganda, he said, the publication, to be named *The Southern Socialist*, might provide a cover for an F.B.I. photographer to circulate freely at radical meetings and other events.

Mr. Burton, who once owned a small newspaper in Colorado, said he prepared a prototype edition of *The Southern Socialist*, but that he and an agent in the F.B.I.'s Chicago office,

reputed to be an expert on Marxist philosophy, could not agree on what line the newspaper should espouse, "and I just kind of let it die."

Mr. Burton said that although he knew of no burglaries carried out by the F.B.I., whenever he visited the home or office of a radical leader, "I always filed an entry report on it."

On some occasions, he said, he was asked for such details as "what kind of locks are on the door and how the windows opened."

After one visit to the Chicago apartment of a black Communist leader, Mr. Burton said he reported to the F.B.I. that the man kept his funds in cash, secreted between the pages of the Marxist volumes in his library.

The F.B.I., he said, was "very specific in asking me, 'Which books? Which page? What shelf?'"

Another time, he said he noticed some letters in the office of another radical group from an American professor "who was in Iran working with this militant organization."

He said he was asked by the bureau to assess "the chances of getting in there and photographing them," but replied that the office was so well guarded that "you can't even get a telephone serviceman in there."

The F.B.I., he said, then offered to supply him with a small, expensive camera "developed in the Soviet Union," but Mr. Burton, concerned about losing his cover, rejected the offer.

During the first year he worked for the F.B.I., he said he subsisted entirely on the meager profits of the swap shop and the salary earned by his wife and declined, out of patriotism, to accept any payment for his services.

But as his finances dwindled, he said he reluctantly agreed in the spring of 1973 to begin accepting compensation from the bureau.

Assigned to Union

Although the payments eventually reached \$400 a month, he said, he found it necessary to ask the bureau for help in finding a second job to supplement his income.

The F.B.I. told him, he said, that they had long wanted to "get somebody in" the Tampa local of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, which had organized

a Westinghouse Corporation plant there that produced equipment for the nuclear power industry.

The bureau told him, he said, that the electrical union was "controlled by Communists," and that to ingratiate himself with the other members, he should "come off as a Marxist."

Although Mr. Burton by then had a reputation as a strident revolutionary and although there was a waiting list for employment at the plant, he said, he was hired immediately and assigned to the daytime shift, unusual for a new worker.

One F.B.I. official in Washington conceded that "we got him a job at Westinghouse," but denied that Mr. Burton had been assigned to infiltrate the union or that the bureau had prevailed upon Westinghouse officials to falsify some aspects of his employment application.

Mr. Burton said that during his five months at Westinghouse, he was asked by the F.B.I. to provide information on "anybody connected with U.E. — what their sentiments were and how they felt."

The bureau was especially interested, he said, in the union's chief Tampa organizer, who had played a key role in the vote to unionize, and Mr. Burton said he kept them advised of what the man "was doing, where he was, what time he was there, and who he was meeting with."

Important to Union

According to one union lawyer, the outcome of the vote was of the greatest importance to the union.

A rejection of the national contract, he said, would have been "a real crisis" and would have undermined the union's bargaining position with the company in other plants.

Among the information Mr. Burton was asked to get by the F.B.I., he said, was an estimate of "how many people would reject the contract."

He said he had made discreet inquiries and reported that it would be accepted without a single negative vote, but that the bureau, terming such

an outcome unlikely, expressed disbelief.

The contract was accepted unanimously, a union official said.

Although union officials said that Mr. Burton's radical proselytizing had made him suspect among his fellow workers as a "company agent" or worse, it apparently did little to damage his stature within the organized labor community.

Several months later, he said, he successfully carried out an assignment to infiltrate a local chapter of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, whose efforts to unionize Tampa garbage collectors had attracted the bureau's attention.

Mr. Burton, who said he earned nearly \$3,000 for his F.B.I. work during the first half of last year, said he was also paid about \$400 each month to cover his operating expenses in Tampa, plus additional funds to finance out-of-town trips, including "about 10" to meet with radical organizations in Canada.

Some of the bureau's money, he said, was contributed by him in the name of Red Star to pay for the activities of domestic and foreign leftist groups, including a wing of the Canadian Communist party, which he said he had been assigned to infiltrate and disrupt.

On one occasion, he said, he was approached by the leader of the Tampa chapter of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, which sought American withdrawal from Vietnam.

Wanted to Merge

The veterans, he said, wanted to merge with the Red Star Cadre and to share expenses on a headquarters office.

"I called the bureau," Mr. Burton said, "and they said, 'Yeah, go ahead, we'll give you the money.'"

Although the two groups never formally merged, Mr. Burton said he and two other operatives the bureau had placed in the Red Star organization did join the veterans' group at the F.B.I.'s direction.

He said that at the F.B.I.'s direction, he began giving the veterans \$50 a month in bu-

reau money to pay half of the rent on the office.

He said that at first he took his assignment seriously and began helping the veterans' Tampa chapter to recruit new members, but was told by his F.B.I. superior, "We don't want to do that, we're trying to kill them in Florida."

Mr. Burton said he then reversed his course and began to promote an internecine dispute between the Tampa chapter and the group's national office that resulted last August in the chapter's expulsion from the organization.

Anti-Nixon Group

Another organization that Mr. Burton said the F.B.I. encouraged him and his two fellow operatives, both former military intelligence officers, to "get control of" was the Bay Area Citizens Opposed to Nixon, which conducted demonstrations in and around Tampa during the Nixon administration's Watergate difficulties.

The group organized a protest last March when then Vice President Ford visited Tampa, he said, adding that shortly before the visit, he and the two other operatives met with bureau agents to plan for their participation in the demonstration.

One of the F.B.I. agents, Mr. Burton said, agreed to provide anti-Nixon placards for the three operatives to distribute to protesters who did not have signs.

Short of gaining outright control of the group, Mr. Burton said, the bureau's hope was "that we could control demonstrations, make them move when we wanted them to, make them shout what we wanted them to."

Despite their apparent lack of success, he said, the F.B.I. did not abandon its efforts to neutralize the group. He said the same technique, complete with F.B.I.-provided placards, was employed again a few weeks later during a protest outside Tampa's Federal Building, where the F.B.I. has its offices.