

Of campus spy calls SDS unit 'mostly talk'

By Henry DeZutter
Staff Writer

URBANA — B-b Harris had had his fill of neo-Nazis at the University of Illinois. And he had a curiosity about the New Left.

That's why Harris, now a senior engineering student, agreed last October to infiltrate the campus chapter of the Students for a Democratic Society as a spy for the FBI.

He agreed because he had confidence in the judgment of Urbana FBI agent Ronald Kloepfer.

Kloepfer told him that SDS was a threat to the national

Third of a series

security and possibly part of a national conspiracy controlled by Communists.

THE SPRING before—when he first became a campus spy for the FBI—Harris had cooperated with Kloepfer in surveillance of a gun-toting neo-Nazi group.

Harris' spy work led to the arrest and conviction of a self-styled Nazi leader on a weapons charge.

"I was glad to cooperate with the FBI," said Harris, 21, a farmboy from Downstate Bardolph. "Though the FBI offered to pick up my expenses, money was not a motive," he said.

"It was not just loyalty to my country," said Harris. "I guess it was partly the self-importance I felt by being called on by the government. And I figured that this university had been good to me and I didn't want anyone to wreck it."

IT WAS ON Oct. 30 last year that Harris attended his first SDS chapter meeting. It was held in "The Red Herring," a

"(SDS) doesn't seem to take direction from any one source. The chairman has no effective control."

coffeehouse popular with student leftists.

He was not impressed. Only 30 students attended. He thought the meeting was loose, undisciplined, inefficient and drab.

"The group doesn't seem to take direction from any one source," he wrote in his diary. "The chairman has no effective control."

THERE WERE discussions about raising money and about plans to distribute leaflets at meeting places on Election Day. There was lots of talk about direct action. But there was little enthusiasm for it.

It was a little unit and no real plans for action.

HARRIS FOUND it easy to win the trust of SDS members. He often had coffee with them in the "Comptons," a cafeteria in the Student Union building.

It was quite different from the high school group he had infiltrated last spring. Discussion was open. Strangers were welcome — even if, like Harris, they didn't say much.

"I just kept my ears open and my mouth shut. I asked a lot of questions — not just for the FBI — but because I was really curious. And in the process of educating me about radical politics they accepted me."

HARRIS ALSO quickly mastered the "hip-Marxist" rhetoric of the student left. He talked freely about the "class struggle;" police became "pigs;" girls became "chicks;" and guys "dudes;" a person was "hassled" or "busted" by the police, never stopped or arrested.

Harris also volunteered to distribute political leaflets in the union building. He ran the mimeograph machine in the Student Senate office, where SDS and other campus groups are free to print leaflets — if they provide the paper. Harris tried hard to seem

sincere — and it worked. SDS members were quick to accept him.

WHAT DID Harris find out about SDS?

First of all, he said, he discovered that the SDS chapter was rather small, ineffective and virtually inactive.

"There was lots of talk about revolution," added Harris. "But they seemed to be more interested in organization than in action."

Harris says he concluded that the SDS chapter at the U. of I. is not part of a national conspiracy — controlled by Communists or other alien forces — but an autonomous operation with a few respected leaders.

THE CHAPTER'S ties to the SDS national office in Chicago

"Nothing ever happened at meetings. There was lots of debate, little unity, no real plans for action."

were minimal, Harris said. No resolution passed at an SDS national conference was binding on the chapter, he said.

"They don't seem to know what they're doing themselves. By the time everyone gets a piece of the debate it's time to go home, so nothing happens."

He said the 50-member chapter was "remarkably inefficient." There was no office or clearinghouse of information and no internal security procedures.

"No one was accumulating building plans, police radios or other tools that may be needed for a possible sit-in," Harris said. "And no one owned a gun that I knew of."

computer lab where he worked. Harris, who was a police officer, also offered the use of his police radio, if they needed it. To the other radicals, Harris became known as "the guy with the radio."

He began to make friends with student radicals. He shared their disgust with the SDS and their views of racism at the university.

But he continued to file full reports to the FBI.

HE MET Agent Klopfer in his car, his home, a restaurant, a classroom. He telephoned Klopfer from his home, a telephone booth in the student union, and a booth next to a laundromat.

"I was asked to supply information about movement leaders," he said.

"This included height, weight, color of eyes and hair. I was asked to identify university photographs — some of them photostatic copies of university identification

cards."

IN FEBRUARY, Harris learned — and told the FBI about — an impending visit by Illinois members of the Black Panther Party. Through the grapevine he learned where the Panthers would be staying. Then a crisis hit the campus. Two Panthers were arrested

in the student union after a run-in with the university police. Harris witnessed the arrests and thought the police were unnecessarily rough.

Because he had originally supplied the FBI with information on the Panthers, Harris felt guilty about his role as an informant.

THE PANTHER arrests angered the Black Student Assn. on campus, and it moved into action. The BSA issued a list of demands, conducted a brief sit-in in the chancellor's office and threatened more action.

Radical white students — spearheaded by SDSers — tried to rally to the blacks' support. There was a lot of talk about seizing a building.

Harris spoke up on behalf of SDS for the first time at a

public meeting of a campus committee.

"It was at that time that I got a sense of the frustration as to why radical students were radical. They simply wanted the university to hold a forum on institutional racism on campus, but the university would have no part in it," he said.

THE SDS members liked

Harris' speech, and invited him to a meeting in one of their homes. At the meeting, Harris recalled, two persons said the white students had to do something militant to show their solidarity with black students.

Some suggested a sit-in. Harris let it be known that he would not participate in a sit-in. He reported with the FBI.

Harris was advised by Klopfer to avoid a sit-in if possible, because he had learned that the university had planned to call the police in right away.

The SDS leaders identified by Harris were called in by university officials and warned

to avoid action. The sit-in was debated at an open meeting. Only 45 of the 400 students present voted to go along and the sit-in proposal fell through.

HARRIS THEN took on an important new SDS assignment. He was placed in charge of securing housing for visiting Midwest SDS leaders during a regional conference on campus March 21, 22, and 23.

Harris knew where all the SDS visitors would be staying, and he had a list of the addresses of all 100 local SDS sympathizers. He forwarded all this information to the FBI.

Harris was asked to find out where parties might be held that weekend. But he couldn't find out.

JUST BEFORE the conference Harris had his first personal meeting with Urbana's chief FBI agent, Charles Travelstead, in Room 50M of the electrical engineering building.

By then, Harris' double role was troubling him deeply. He felt disloyal to his new friends. He had difficulty sleeping.

At the meeting with Travelstead, the FBI agent asked Harris to identify SDS members in pictures of recent demonstrations.

HARRIS WAS stunned when

Travelstead started asking him for detailed personal information about SDS leaders.

"He wanted to know where they banked, where they got their money, and whether they had girl friends that they slept with.

"I told him I'd try to find out," said Harris. "But I never did."

ONE WEEK later, while vacationing in Orlando, Fla., with SDS leaders, Harris decided to confess his double role to his SDS friends.

"He asked us if we wondered why he was so quiet on the drive down," recalled one SDSer. "Then he said he was the FBI informer on SDS but was quitting to join the movement."

"Whereupon we dropped our teeth," chimed in another SDSer.

TUESDAY: Why Bob Harris quit spying for the FBI.