

# Ga. Utility Kept Files On Critics

By Bill Richards

Washington Post Staff Writer

ATLANTA — The Georgia Power Co., one of the nation's biggest electric utilities, ran a sophisticated intelligence-gathering operation here whose targets allegedly included Ralph Nader, environmental and consumer activists, the Georgia chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union and the press.

Allegations of misuse of Georgia Power's security apparatus, which included a nine-member intelligence-gathering unit, have touched off an investigation by the Georgia Public Service Commission and threats of lawsuits from several persons allegedly included in Georgia Power's intelligence files.

According to allegations by former senior members of the utility's investigative unit and copies of documents made available to The Washington Post, Georgia Power covertly gathered intelligence on persons and groups believed to be opponents of the company beginning in 1973.

Company records indicate that security officers conducted a three-day "background investigation" into a Nader group. While company security officials denied last week that any such investigation took place, two former members of the Georgia Power investigative unit said they recalled that a company investigator was sent to Washington to attend a Nader-sponsored conference.

Other entries into the security unit's monthly case log, a portion of which was among copies of documents made available to The Post last week, showed similar requests for investigations of "news media" and others apparently outside the normal scope of the company's operations.

Former company security officers who were part of the investigative section told The Post that among the names included in Georgia Power's investigative files were one the state's leading consumer attorneys, the head of the state ACLU chapter

and several persons who opposed construction of a Georgia Power nuclear plant.

According to the former security officials and Georgia Power records on file here with the Federal Power Commission, the utility also maintained links with shadowy private intelligence-gathering organizations in Washington and on the West Coast.

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The extent of the Georgia Power intelligence operation was first made public by The Atlanta Journal in September. After the Journal article appeared, Georgia Power Vice President George W. Edwards denied in a letter to the paper that his company had ever engaged in "spying on innocent private citizens."

In an interview at the utility's corporate headquarters here last week Georgia Power officials said no secret intelligence gathering is now under way by the company except for files on persons who made threats against Georgia Power employees or company property.

But a company spokesman acknowledged that files on non-criminal opponents of the utility may have been opened by the Georgia Power security unit "for a few days" in the past.

Terry Leedom, a spokesman for Georgia Power, said the opening of files on persons normally outside the range of company security interest may have been considered necessary during the "years of turbulence." Leedom described this period as ranging from the late 1960's through the early 1970s. He said any such files would have been destroyed some time ago.

However, Leedom confirmed reports to The Post by other informed sources that on the evening of the appearance of the Journal article Georgia Power security officials and a company attorney spent 12 hours combing through the security files and that a number of documents were removed.

Arthur Benson, head of Georgia Power's security office, denied that any of the documents removed from the files had been destroyed and said all of the papers were eventually returned to the security office. Benson acknowledged, however, that no record was made of which files were taken and the only way he could tell they were all back was that "I haven't found anything missing."

Georgia Power has declined requests from reporters to be allowed to examine the security files. The company has also refused to make available copies of the security depart-

ment's monthly investigative case logs which show what types of investigations were done.

A copy of the index of file categories, which was maintained by the Georgia Power security office, was made available to The Post. The index shows that Georgia Power investigators looked into a number of standard criminal areas such as thefts from the company.

The index contains several broad categories under the headings of "miscellaneous" and "management request for investigation outside Georgia Power." It was in these categories, according to former security unit investigators, that covert intelligence gathering was conducted on persons and groups believed to be opponents of the company.

John H. Taylor, a former senior member of the Georgia Power security staff, said the files were keyed into a set of index cards in which individuals and organizations were listed. Among the names in the files, he said, were persons who had opposed the utility's requests for rate increases.

In a sworn deposition given in September Taylor said the scope of the utility's investigations was extremely wide. "Any management person could request an investigation and, normally, the investigation would be performed," Taylor said.

Taylor said in the deposition that one senior Georgia Power management official had requested a number of investigations on individuals not connected with Georgia Power.

Company security department case logs show that the utility official made one request in August, 1973, of "news media." The case files do not identify which organization or person was the subject of the request or whether it was carried out.

A separate management request for an "individual investigation" is listed on the case logs under the category "open-s." Taylor said this category—which is not among those on the security department's file index—referred to special investigations of persons company officials considered "subversives."

Taylor called Georgia Power's security files "a dirt-gathering operation."

Taylor was fired by the company several days after he gave his deposition. A company spokesman said Taylor was fired because of "a lack of enthusiasm and interest" and because he compromised security procedures in the deposition.

William Lovin, another former member of the utility's investigative unit, said in an interview last week that the company's investigators were equipped with a number of expensive devices such as secret beepers which could be planted on cars to be tailed, night photography equipment and company cars equipped with switches to alter headlight and taillight configurations for night tailing.

In addition Lovin, a former Army intelligence specialist, said he was shown equipment purchased by Georgia Power to tap telephones and bug rooms. Lovin said he never saw the equipment used. Company officials last week denied ever having such equipment, which is illegal here.

Georgia Power investigators were so well-equipped, said Lovin, that local FBI agents once complained that the utility was way ahead of them in its surveillance ability.

Lovin was also fired by Georgia Power. Company officials said he was fired after conducting "an unauthorized surveillance." Lovin said the firing was because he shadowed a company official suspected of stealing Georgia Power equipment.

Lovin, who now lives in Macon, said in an interview that as a Georgia Power investigator he had access to police information. "I'd give a sheriff a list of names and he'd tell me if there was any thing on them anywhere, no matter who they were," he said.

Federal Power Commission records also show that Georgia Power paid \$4,770 last year to buy information from an Oakland, Calif., private detective agency known as Research West. Utility officials said they were referred to Research West several years ago by officials of the Pacific Gas and Electric Co., a West Coast utility. Georgia Power used the agency to supply information on prospective employees, according to its security officials.

Research West has been publicly identified as specializing in providing

information on various left-wing groups and individuals. One person who has apparently supplied Research West with information is Jerome Ducote, an admitted burglar.

In a telephone interview last week Ducote admitted burglarizing 17 offices of such organizations as the United Farm Workers, Ramparts magazine and the late radical Chicago community organizer, Saul Alinsky, during the 1960s. Information from the burglaries—the statute of limitations has expired on all of them—was supplied to Research West's predecessor called Western Research, according to Ducote.

Ducote, who is writing a book on his thefts called "The Good Thief," said Western Research supplied a number of corporate clients with information on suspected "subversives."

The agency has no telephone listing, and Research West officials could not be reached to determine if Western Research knew it was getting stolen information from Ducote.

Georgia Power investigators have also collected information for the utility's security files from John H. Rees, publisher of a small newsletter called Information Digest. The newsletter supplies a handful of subscribers—mainly police departments—with information on alleged radical groups, including Georgia Power opponents.

Georgia Power security director Benson last week called Rees an old personal friend, and said he had received information from Rees after Rees attended meetings of Georgia Power opponents in Atlanta. Rees said he had attended as a reporter for his newsletter. Benson also said names and information from Rees' Information Digest had been entered into Georgia Power's security files.

Rees declined to say whether he had been paid by Georgia Power. Benson, said, however, that Rees had been given use of a company van as "a personal favor" to return to Washington after his Atlanta trip.

A New York state legislative report has charged that Rees' newsletter contains "raw, unevaluated, editorialized and frequently derogatory information." The report said the newsletter's information was being used to "develop dossiers on thousands of patriotic and decent Americans."