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More FBI Double Dealing

Pub
5-8-76

While the late J. Edgar Hoover was directing agents of his Federal Bureau of Investigation to smear and ruin private citizens he didn't like, he was being deluded within his own headquarters, we now learn, by deceitful reports from assistants who apparently told the director what he wanted to hear.

Not only was Hoover dangerously misusing the federal police powers, he was being fed false and obsequious information on which to base his reprehensible acts.

That double danger surfaced last

The writer is editor and president of the St. Petersburg Times from which this article is reprinted.

week when a staff study was released on the Senate investigation into FBI spying on American citizens in Hoover's time.

The study contained a memo from William Sullivan, Hoover's deputy, to Hoover. This writer has personal knowledge that the information Sullivan fed his superior was false.

Sullivan told Hoover in 1965 that the late Atlanta Constitution publisher Ralph McGill said and did certain dishonorable things which I know he did not say or do.

My office, as editor of The Constitution at that time, adjoined McGill's. As close personal friends and professional running mates we talked repeatedly every day, lunched together, shared our problems and sought each other's advice. We were inseparable, in almost constant contact, and during our 12 years together I never knew him to tell me an untruth or deceive me on his thinking.

Nothing disturbed us more during that stressful time of Southern desegregation than our separate discoveries, which we immediately shared, that FBI agents were spying on the personal life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Our knowledge was firsthand. Agents of the Atlanta FBI bureau visited us in our offices and alleged they had proof of Dr. King's involvement in extra-martial affairs. In my case an agent, on two separate visits, insisted strenuously that I assign a

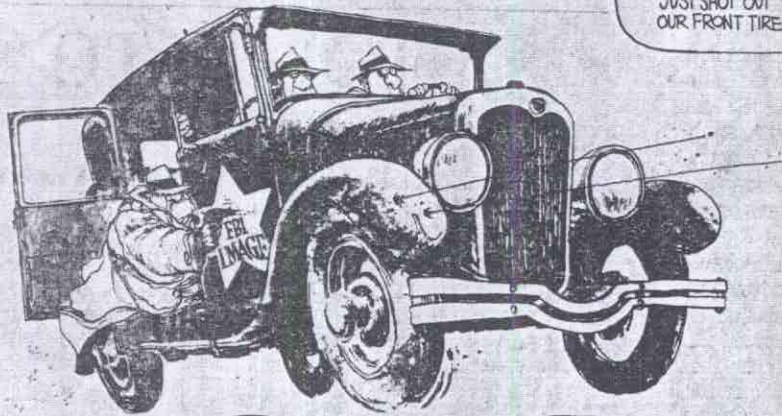
reporter and photographer to catch Dr. King and his companion at an airport where an FBI "informant" (meaning bug) said he was going to board a plane at the coming weekend. When I tried to explain we did not publish a peephole journal, and told the agent a person's private life is not news, he hotly criticized The Constitution for supporting Dr. King's public leadership and blinding its readers to his private "immorality." Other Southern newspapers received similar visits and to the press's credit not one printed the FBI's smears to Dr. King's lifetime.

McGill and I were astonished and outraged that our friends in the FBI Atlanta bureau had been assigned, obviously by Hoover, to such a dirty business as character assassination, and by these sleazy means.

Ralph McGill could muster a towering anger and I never saw him madder. His first impulse was to get word to Dr. King so he could protect himself. He picked up the telephone to pass the information to Dr. King's father but I dissuaded him from upsetting Dr. King Sr. by spreading the FBI's smear around the family.

He spoke of getting in touch instead with Atty. Gen. Robert Kennedy to let him know what the FBI was up to. I don't know if he reached Kennedy personally. I personally told this story to John Doar, one of Kennedy's assistants, and was appalled when I got no reaction from him, not even an indication he had heard what I said (and we were speaking face to face). I realized then that Hoover either was beyond Kennedy's control, or else Kennedy knew what Hoover was doing. McGill and I traded disappointed exclamations over this.

Thereafter McGill's columns supported Dr. King's leadership of the



By MacNelly for the Richmond News Leader

civil rights movement more strongly than ever.

But Sullivan's memo to Hoover claimed that McGill was so shocked by the FBI's information on Dr. King's private life that he stated he would use his influence to get Dr. King out of the leadership of the civil rights movement! That must have been music to Hoover's ears, encouraging him to press on with his bugs and taps on Dr. King's bedroom. The problem is, it just wasn't so. McGill's shock was directed at the FBI, and his support went to Dr. King. He'd have been the last man in the world to desert King in these circumstances.

Worse, Sullivan's memo went on to regale Hoover with the notion that McGill would attempt to block an Atlanta banquet scheduled to honor Dr. King after he won the Nobel Prize. McGill would work through a banker friend to get the business community to withdraw its support for the banquet, Hoover was told by Sullivan.

That fabrication is a laugh for one who was there, as I was. There wasn't any business community support.

The fact is that McGill was the only white business or professional leader in Atlanta who stepped forward to co-sponsor the banquet, in conjunction with a Catholic bishop and a Jewish rabbi, while the bankers and businessmen of that city ran for cover. In conversations with me McGill alternately raged and laughed at the spectacle of Atlanta's white establishment being too timid or too segregationist to even send second vice presidents to the banquet honoring a black Nobel Prize winner.

While Hoover enjoyed Sullivan-inspired visions of the great liberal newspaper publisher warning an eager business establishment, away from the King banquet, I watched

McGill work his way around the boycotting businessmen to the holders of real power in Atlanta, whom he persuaded to bring their influence and pressure to bear on the bankers to support the King banquet. At a very late hour the banquet was saved from being a lonely gathering of black people and a few white humanists by an inpouring of second vice presidents, and even some firsts, because the word had been passed from on high as a result of McGill's single-handed exertions.

I had thought the finest irony of that banquet was the praise Time magazine later lavished on Atlanta because the white establishment had honored a black son, the kind of national publicity that brought a boom to that once sleepy town.

But now the Senate investigating staff has disclosed the true irony. Hoover thought McGill was trying to sabotage the banquet, because his agents had told him so.

The implication speaks for itself. An autocratic FBI director, armed with the public's trust and secure from a cowed Congress, could misuse his power to stalk and smear any American citizen of his choosing including you or me. And probably because he wanted only good news, he got demonstrably false intelligence upon which to base his whims. Frightening?

Consider the footnote: The agent who failed to persuade me to smear Dr. King in *The Atlanta Constitution* got a harsh Hoover letter and an overnight transfer to a distant city not long after he failed to come up with clippings that would have pleased Hoover. I saw the letter. It said the agent was being punished for being six pounds overweight.