

Cointelpro:

The FBI's Seven Programs to Disrupt Political Groups

By Vin McLellan

The FBI, following a federal court order, has released two extremely revealing documents which list the Bureau's seven counterintelligence programs and provide, for the first time, undeniable proof that the agency set up a formal program to infiltrate and disrupt wholly legitimate political organizing.

The seven Bureau Cointelpro counterintelligence programs were:

- Cointelpro - Espionage
- Cointelpro - New Left
- Cointelpro - Disruption of White Hate Groups
- Cointelpro - Communist Party, USA
- Counterintelligence and Special Operations
- Cointelpro - Black Extremists
- Socialist Workers Party Disruption Program

The two documents, released as a result of a suit filed by Ralph Nader's Freedom of Information Clearing House, a public interest law group, on behalf of Carl Stern, NBC investigative reporter, were the directives through which the late FBI czar J. Edgar Hoover set up and then discontinued the Cointelpro - New Left. The attack on the New Left was initiated on May 8, 1968 and discontinued on April 28, 1971. We learn of the other six

4/28/71

Airtel

To: SAC, Albany

From: Director, FBI

PERSONAL ATTENTION

COUNTERINTELLIGENCE PROGRAMS (COINTELPROS)
INTERNAL SECURITY - RACIAL MATTERS

Effective immediately, all COINTELPROS operated by this Bureau are discontinued. These include:

- COINTELPRO - Espionage
- COINTELPRO - New Left
- COINTELPRO - Disruption of White Hate Groups
- COINTELPRO - Communist Party, USA
- Counterintelligence and Special Operations
- COINTELPRO - Black Extremists
- Socialist Workers Party - Disruption Program

One of the Documents Made Public By the Courts.

programs only because the directive which terminated Cointelpro - New Left was the same order that discontinued the other six Cointel programs. It is not known when the other six programs were initiated or for how long they functioned.

The Hoover directive that ended these programs was apparently part of the Bureau's frantic response to the first revelations from the so-called Media Files. On March 8, 1971, a still-unknown group called the Citizens' Commission to Investigate the FBI burglarized the Media, Pa., office of the FBI and took all files, bulletins, dossiers and Bureau internal documents - everything but the toilet paper - while the agents and practically every other red-blooded American boy were home watching the Clay-Liston fight. Three weeks later, they began to mail batches of internal FBI documents to newsmen and lawmakers, revealing with the Bureau's own files the FBI's policies and programs of political repression. The Citizens' Commission, still unapprehended today, kept sending out batches of documents over the following several months with a devastating effect upon the Bureau's public image. (Led by *Washington Post*, which ignored threats and pleas from then Attorney General John Mitchell and Hoover, the press spread before the nation the first hard documentary evidence of the extent to which the FBI had become a political police agency, a guardian of orthodoxy daunted by neither the Constitution nor the Bill of Rights.)

A Hoover directive of May 14, 1968 set forth the goals and purposes of Cointelpro-New Left. "The purpose of this program is to expose, disrupt, and otherwise neutralize the activities of the various New Left organizations, their leadership and adherents," wrote the Director. "We must frustrate every effort of these groups and individuals to consolidate their forces or to recruit new or youthful adherents."

"In every instance, consideration should be given to disrupting the organized activity of these groups and no opportunity should be missed to capitalize upon organizational and personal conflicts in their leadership."

All Bureau offices, Hoover ordered, must follow the activities of New Left organizations and its key activists "on a continuous basis" to take advantage of all counterintelligence opportunities and "also inspire action where circumstances warrant."

The unexplained phrase "inspire action" is understood by veteran bureau watchers to refer to agent provocateur activity - such as that documented in the activities of Boyd Douglas in the Berrigan Case in Harrisburg and of Robert Hardy in the Camden 28 Case - where the FBI infiltrator became the prime mover in initiating and organizing illegal activity to trap anti-government activists.

The "immediate termination" order on all seven programs - a typical action by Hoover, who governed the Bureau with blunt sweeping directives - may have

played into the internal bureaucratic war ongoing in the Bureau at that time. The order itself, however, brings to mind the rash of Hoover memos in March of 67 limiting on-campus FBI activity after a *Ramparts* expose on CIA funding and infiltration of the National Student Association caused a public uproar.

Hoover - fearful of the flak from the Media exposures - terminated the programs at a time when the thrust of administration policy and internal Bureau politics was pushing for more, not less, "infiltrate and disrupt" programs.

Hoover ended the programs in May, 1971. In July, 1970, presidential security advisor Tom Charles Huston received President Nixon's approval of a domestic security program which called for increased illegal electronic surveillance, illegal mail inspection, break-ins, and intensified informer tactics against dissident American citizens. Putting all his prestige on the line, and reportedly threatening to expose the Nixon-ordered "Kissinger taps" of the newsmen and high government officials, Hoover forced Nixon to

withdraw the Huston plan, but Huston continued to maintain a drumbeat of White House criticism that the FBI was being too soft on domestic dissent.

It was after Hoover issued the directive cancelling the Cointelpro operations that the deputy director of the FBI, William Sullivan, formerly head of the Bureau's Domestic Intelligence Division, stole the records of the "Kissinger taps" from the FBI files and delivered them to Asst. Attorney General Robert Mardian who turned them over to John Erlichman. Sullivan's theft was apparently an attempt to disarm Hoover and gain White House support for himself as Hoover's successor. But the old man put them all down and wiped out his bureau opposition in the fall of 1971, firing Sullivan and demoting Chester Brennan, then head of the Domestic

Intelligence Division.

In August, 1970, after Hoover had torpedoed the Huston plan in July, the Bureau held an important internal policy conference on the New Left, according to Bureau insiders. From the circulated Media Files, it is obvious that the Bureau responded directly to

that the Bureau informers within the Black Panthers had been told to align themselves with either the Cleaver faction or the Newton faction and intensify the split," said one college professor who had consulted with Bureau officials.

Even in the Hoover Cointelpro termination memo, Hoover noted that "in exceptional instances where it is considered

—Please turn to page 18

the threat and advanced criticism by Huston. From memos of the special agent in charge at Media to his agents we see the impact. The agents were ordered to restructure coverage of the left into a split jurisdiction, the "New Left" and the "old" left, and were urged to step up interviews with young left activists to (in the oft quoted and notorious phrase) heighten the endemic paranoia and strengthen the fear "that there is an FBI agent behind every mailbox." Hoover also first authorized at this time the recruitment of informers under 21 years of age - something Huston had pressed for in his aborted program.

(In the same Media memos, circulated on September 9, 1970, after a briefing on the Washington conference, the agents were warned to keep a tighter rein on agent provocateurs. "There have been a few instances where security informers got carried away, during a demonstration, assaulted police, etc.")

Academicians who worked with the Bureau in the summer of 1971, after the Cointelpros were cancelled, report that top Bureau officials were willing to admit to them that the agency was still using counter-intelligence agents to infiltrate and factionalize the Black Panthers. It seems that Cointel programs among black militants, particularly the Panthers, were continued. Indeed, with agents already in place and their politics already known within the group they had infiltrated - it would be almost impossible for an informer known as militant and inflammatory to suddenly "change" from fratricidal hawk to dove.

"They told me quite frankly

PAGE EIGHTEEN

DECEMBER 18, 1973, THE BOSTON

Cointelpro

Continued from page 3

counterintelligence actions is warranted... (such action) will be considered on an individual basis."

The single most striking thing that comes to mind reviewing these Cointel programs is the almost universal success that they enjoyed. The New Left, the Communist Party, White Hate groups like the KKK and "Black extremists" like the Black Panthers have all been wracked with bloody factioning, schisms and leadership splits. It is a cliché today that the New Left factionalized itself to death; perhaps now more thought ought to be given to the hand of the Bureau in all that.

The Bureau's infiltration and the resulting organizational corruption of the Communist Party is a story that millions learned from "I Led 3 Lives" on 50s television.

The story of the Bureau's infiltration of the KKK is set forth in the 1970 book by the Bureau's historian, Don Whitehead: "Attack on Terror, the FBI Against the KKK in Mississippi." Objective analysis of Whitehead's story shows that, even if Bureau policy on Cointel is negative, with infiltrators in place seeking information on criminal activities they invariably engage in "inspired action" for Cointel purposes. Spreading rumors, gossip and factional hatred, Whitehead says FBI infiltrators soon reduced Klan meetings to "bickering, distrust and wrangling over money."

Many young leftist veterans would find the image familiar.

The story is the same among the Black Power groups, leadership squabbles, petty bickering, bloody in-fighting (literally, with assassinations and gunplay between rival organizers and ideologues) reduced and finally destroyed every militant Black group, with the exception of the Black Muslims.

On the white left, strangely, it is the Socialist Workers Party, an "old left" group, that seems to have best withstood the determined efforts of Bureau agents to fragment and demoralize - this despite the fact that the Bureau considered them a key target and had actually gone so far as to focus Cointel program directly against the group. (SWP now has a pending lawsuit in New York for an injunction against harassment, infiltration and intimidation of their members.)

We have gone long past the point where any aware citizen could doubt that activists in dissident and minority political groups are subjected to surveillance, mailcover, wiretapping and infiltration. And when the President personally approves a policy of burglary - as Nixon admitted when he said he approved the Huston plan - little should surprise.

But still, it is difficult to acknowledge the scale involved. Next to wiretapping, infiltrators and informers have drawn the most public attention. Yet for all the dozens of celebrated informers which the government has brought forward - from Douglas, to Lemmer, a state coordinator for the Vietnam Veteran Against the War, to Tom Mosher, a white who became so important to the Panthers that in 1971 they

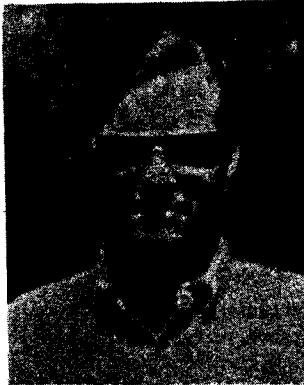
refused to meet with Weatherman representatives without him present - there is still reason to believe that the surface is barely scratched.

Almost all the informers who have been revealed are almost palpably crazy - schizoid paranoids; and there has been much talk that this is the standard species for the role. Unlikely. Long-standing Bureau policy has been to reveal only expendable infiltrators unless absolutely necessary to do otherwise. And no one familiar with the Media files - which document a plan to get an informer on *every block* of the Philadelphia ghetto can doubt that they have numbers to chose from.

We have some glimpses of the divisive tactics used by the Cointel programs on the record. The use of informers to split the groups, as in the Panthers, is obvious. More sophisticated tactics were also used. Robert Wall, a former FBI agent who resigned after five years service in 1970, has reported how he was assigned to Cointelpro-New Left in Washington, D.C. One of the divisive ploys he recounted involved a letter written to the leaders of the National Mobilization Committee in D.C. threatening that the Blacks in Washington would not support an upcoming rally unless a "security bond" of \$20,000 was given to a black organization. The Bureau forged the signature of the leader of the black organization, and at the same time had its informers in the black organization suggest the idea of the security bond to the leaders of the black group informally. "Later," said Wall, "through informants in the NMC, we learned that the letter had caused a great deal of

confusion and had a significant effect on the planning for the march."

Wall also revealed that the Cointelpro relied heavily on leaking "confidential" FBI files and "sometimes just fanciful lies" to sympathetic media contacts. Hoover's memo setting up the New Left Cointel stresses covert use of the media as a Bureau policy to be



Informer Boyd Douglas: Important to FBI's Game Plan.

implemented locally - like in Boston.

Frank Donner, director of the American Civil Liberties Union project on political surveillance said that he has learned from Bureau sources that FBI technicians developed a machine capable of perfectly reproducing a signature and used it tactically to sow distrust and dissension among Communist Party members.

The Bureau planted "signed documents" in the car of a N.Y. Communist functionary by the name of William Anderson and arranged to have them discovered and Anderson denounced as an FBI spy. The CP went so far as to turn the papers over to an "expert

attached to the Russian embassy" who pronounced the signature Anderson's. Anderson was discredited and bounced from the Party. (A civil libertarian note: Membership and activity in the CP is constitutionally protected.)

Another Cointel project that was revealed in the Media papers was a program to mail articles critical of the New Left to unfathomly "liberal" college administrators anonymously. One of the Media documents is a note assigning colleges to agents for the selective distribution of a article from *Barron's* on the barbarian hordes at Columbia.

The FBI fought a nine-month court battle attempting to withhold these documents, but the D.C. federal court found that the Bureau's claim that they were "investigative law enforcement files" specious and ordered them revealed as agency "policy and programs" under the Freedom of Information Act. This was the first time the courts have compelled the Justice Department to make a Freedom of Information revelation and will set a precedent that will be very useful for those who dislike hidden government policy.

Although the court ruled in September, the FBI delayed release until a week ago Thursday - in the last week of the Congressional session and on the same day that Gerald Ford was sworn in as vice president. The Bureau apparently hoped to avoid Congressional inquiry and to have the news lost in the flood of copy about the Ford oath.

On both counts, for the time being, the Bureau can be credited with meticulous planning and successful implementation.