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The FBI and Radical Groups

From the FBI's most secret files, the story has been compiled of the FBI's undercover efforts to "disrupt and distract" subversive and radical groups. The activities ranged from leaking derogatory material about a congressional candidate to "investigating the love life of a group leader for dissemination of the press."

The undercover operation was known inside the FBI by the code name "Cointelpro," which is bureaucratic shorthand for "counter-intelligence program." We have obtained a 21-page summary, which the FBI has prepared for Attorney General William Saxbe, of the supersecret Cointelpro activities.

By the FBI's own admission, "some Cointelpro activities involved isolated instances of practices that can only be considered abhorrent in a free society." Yet the FBI reminded Saxbe: "It is important to understand that these improper activities were not the purpose or indeed even the major characteristic of the FBI's Cointelpro efforts."

The 21-page document gives no names and only few details. In at least one case, however, we have learned the full story.

During the 1968 presidential inaugural, demonstrators kept in touch with one another by "citizen band" radio. The document tells of "using the same frequency . . . to provide disinformation to disrupt demonstrations . . ."

The demonstrators had planned to stone President Nixon's limousine and kill him if they could. By impersonating the group's leaders over the radio, however, the FBI caused the demonstrators to assemble several blocks from Nixon's route.

The "group leader" whose "love life" was investigated could well have been the late Dr. Martin Luther King. We have seen an FBI report on Dr. King's romances. A copy was slipped to us, however, by a White House, not an FBI, source. We cited the report in a column scolding the FBI for prying into Dr. King's private life.

According to the secret summary, the Cointelpro effort consisted of "seven separate counterintelligence programs which the bureau implemented at different times during the period from 1956 to 1971 . . ."

Two of the programs were designed to "encourage and stimulate a variety of counterintelligence efforts against hostile foreign intelligence sources, foreign Communist organizations and individuals abroad."

The five remaining programs, the

document reveals, "were directed at domestic based groups and individuals." They were the Communist Party, U.S.A., Socialist Workers Party, white hate groups, black extremists, and New Left.

All seven Cointelpro programs, according to the summary provided to Saxbe, "were specifically authorized by former FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover." FBI files indicate Hoover consulted with no one in the Justice Department, "in Congress or the White House."

A "total of some 3,208 proposals for counterintelligence activity were submitted by various FBI field offices for consideration . . . Some 2,337 of these proposals . . . were approved and implemented."

The types of activity conducted under the Cointelpro program included:

• "Obtaining tax returns of members of a group."

• "Furnishing the arrest and conviction record of a member of a group who was (a) candidate for a local public office to a friendly newspaper which published the information."

• "Furnishing information concerning arrests of an individual to a court that had earlier given this individual a suspended sentence and also furnishing this same information to his employer who later discharged him."

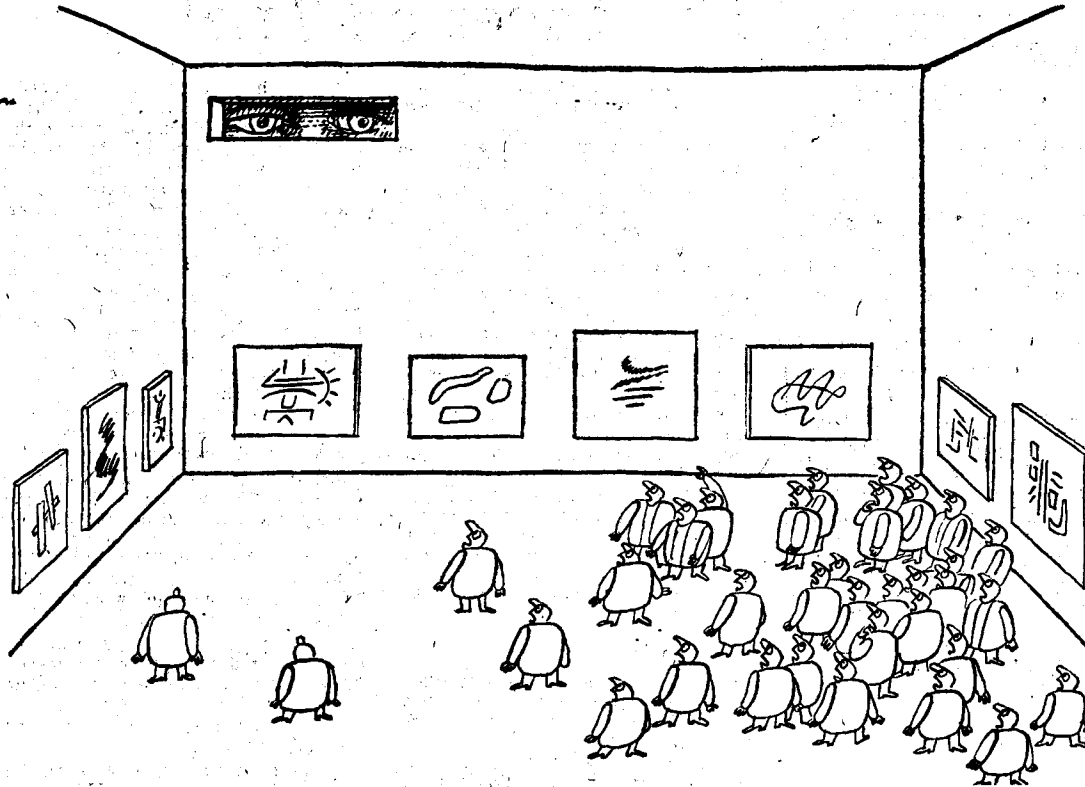
• "Furnishing information apparently falsely to high officials of a group that a ranking official of the group was an FBI informant, resulting in the individual's expulsion and profound disruption within the entire group."

• "Forging of a group's business card for informant purposes."

• "Reproducing a group leader's signature stamp."

• "Reproducing a group's recruiting card."

• "Sending anonymous or fictitious



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materials to members or groups . . . to create dissension and cause disruption within the various groups."

- Leaking both "public source material" and "non-public information to . . . friendly media sources for the purpose of exposing the nature, aims and membership of the various groups."

- Using informants "to disrupt the activities of various groups by sowing dissension and exploiting disputes."

- "Notifying credit bureaus, creditors, employers and prospective employers of members' illegal, immoral, radical and Communist Party activities in order to affect adversely their credit standing or employment status."

- Interviewing or contacting members of various groups "for the purpose of letting (them) know that the FBI was aware of their activity and also in an attempt to develop informants."

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