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FBI reveals secrets of harassment drive

WASHINGTON (AP)— The FBI is spilling 53,000 pages of secrets about its efforts to harass civil rights groups and radical political organizations between 1956 and 1971.

The files, being made public in response to requests under the Freedom of Information Act, are expected to yield a harvest of fresh details about the widely criticized counterintelligence programs, called Cointelpro in FBI lingo.

Although the bureau has turned over several thousand pages of Cointelpro files to various groups during the last five years, the action Monday represents the biggest single chunk of Cointelpro material the FBI has ever released.

But bureau officials said some files will be kept secret because they deal with national security and foreign intelligence matters.

In essence, Cointelpro was the FBI "dirty tricks" operation. It was a campaign to wreak havoc among militants of the right and left by sending anonymous letters, attempting to get activists fired from their jobs, fostering dissension among political allies and spread-

ing derogatory rumors about militant leaders.

The effort has been roundly denounced by dozens of congressional leaders and legal authorities, and few in the FBI still attempt to defend it.

FBI Director Clarence Kelley last year issued a public apology for the including some Cointelpro actions. Former Atty. Gen. Edward Levi once said of the Cointelpro tricks, "All of them were foolish and some of them were outrageous."

Kelley and other FBI officials insist that no Cointelpro operations have been carried out since April 1971.

The operation began in 1956 when then-Director J. Edgar Hoover ordered a campaign against the Communist Party U.S.A. In later years, other political dissidents became Cointelpro targets as Hoover perceived them to be threats to national security.

The Socialist Workers Party became a target in 1961, and the decade of the '60s saw the Ku Klux Klan, "black extremists" and the New Left targeted for FBI disruption.

Dr. Martin Luther King, the civil rights leader and Nobel Prize laureate, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference he headed until he was assassinated were subjected to perhaps the most vigorous FBI harassment.

The FBI wiretapped King's telephones, bugged his hotel rooms and leaked derogatory information about his personal life in an effort to discredit him with black activists.