

Clark Calls for Probe of FBI Tactics Against Extremists

3/12/74
By Susanna McBee

Washington Post Staff Writer

Former Attorney General Ramsey Clark called yesterday for a "thorough public investigation" of FBI tactics used to discredit and disrupt a variety of black, white, and left-wing groups from 1961 to 1971.

Clark said in a telephone interview from New York, where he practices law, that the inquiry should be conducted by a special commission created by Congress and should consist of senators, congressmen and representatives of the public.

The tactics were revealed in nine documents written by the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover that were released by the Justice Department on Dec. 8 and last Thursday.

Two documents disclosed Hoover's counterintelligence program from 1968 to 1971 against the New Left. The other seven disclosed similar programs from 1961 through 1970 against the Black Panther Party, the Ku Klux Klan, the Socialist Workers Party and "black extremist" groups and individuals.

Among the tactics that "fabricating" documents, plant Hoover suggested using were ing spies who would pretend to be disgruntled policemen, discrediting "extremist" leaders in their own communities and planting news stories.

In a 1968 memo to field agents, Hoover said their duty was to prevent the rise of a black "messiah," to prevent "violence on the part of black nationalist groups," and to prevent the coalition of such groups that could become "a real 'Mau Mau' in America, the beginning of a true black revolution."

Clark and former Attorneys General Nicholas deB. Katzenbach and Richard G. Kleindienst said they were not informed of the programs while they were at the Justice Department. Internal FBI memos did not routinely go to the Attorney General's office, they said.

"There's a very lawless tone

to the memos," said Clark, who was Attorney General in 1967 and 1968. "I don't think any of the tactics are ever acceptable for a government to use. Hoover showed an almost deranged attitude on certain subjects like the 'messiah' and the coalition of black nationalist groups."

Clark noted that once Hoover memo seemed to approve the 1967 arrests of black nationalist leaders by police in an unnamed city "on every possible charge until they could no longer make bail" and that, as a result, the leaders "spent most of the summer in jail" and therefore could not foment violence.

Police arrests without cause are federal offenses, Clark said.

"The memos may reflect standards and patterns of conduct that might be more pervasive, that might apply to more than these organizations. I have no confidence that any of this conduct has stopped."

FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley said last night on the Public Broadcasting Service program "Washington Straight Talk" that all the counterintelligence programs were ended in 1971.

"They have not been reinstated," he said, "and I have no plans, no intention to reinstate them now." He said, however, that legislation is needed to control extremist activity.

Kelley also said he does not think "there was any great harm wrought as a result of" the FBI tactics. "One of the greater faults would be inactivity, not doing something

about it," he said, referring to potential extremist violence.

Katzenbach, who was Attorney General from 1969 to late 1968, said he was not surprised that the FBI would gather intelligence about extremist groups but was surprised that it would put out false information to such groups.

He recalled asking Alex Rosen, then an assistant FBI director (now retired), in 1962 if the bureau could spread a false rumor as to when James Meredith, the first black to enter the University of Mississippi, would register at the school.

"Rosen said the FBI never gave out false information, that if it did, it would lose all credibility," said Katzenbach, who was deputy attorney general in 1962.

He said he was unaware of a 1964 memo that Hoover wrote, proposing disruption of the Ku Klux Klan.

"I do recall being asked by the bureau if agents could go visit Klan leaders, not to arrest them, but to make their presence known and to let the Klan know it was being watched," Katzenbach said. "I thought that would be helpful because there had been a series of church bombings; so I said, yes."