
By STEVEN V. ROBERTS

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 30—The Federal Bureau of Investigation's files on Representative Robert F. Drinan, a Roman Catholic priest, contained summaries of several of his sermons. The dossier on Eldridge Cleaver, a former leader of the Black Panthers, recorded the name of a person who took fried chicken to a political conference. Gabriel Kaimowitz, a lawyer in Michigan, found a picture of the family St. Bernard in his state police-records.

Comparing Government files is a popular parlor game for political activists and journalists these days, and many of them would agree with Representative Drinan's assessment of official investigations: "God, the time wasted was incredible."

For some, the files are no joking matter. The Institute for Policy Studies, a left-wing research organization here, discovered that the F.B.I. had at one time stolen its trash as part of a massive surveillance operation that involved more than a dozen agents. They operated like a political police system," said Marcus G. Raskin, the institute's codirector.

About the only thing worse than having a big F.B.I. file, in certain circles, is having a small one or none at all; the humiliation ranks with being left off Richard M. Nixon's enemies list.

"A lot of Congressmen are afraid to ask for their files," crowed Representative Drinan, whose dossier ran 81 pages. "They're afraid they don't have one."

The Freedom of Information Act was adopted in 1966, but most investigative files were not opened to the public until the act was amended in 1975. Since then, the F.B.I. alone has re-

Capital's Latest Game Is 'Match the Dossier'

ceived about 40,000 requests for information; the Defense Department and the Central Intelligence Agency are also popular targets.

To obtain a Government file, one must write to the agency involved invoking the Freedom of Information Act. It helps to provide personal details, particularly if the name is not unusual, and to offer to pay the costs of duplicating the material, usually 10 cents a page. At one time the backlog was so large that requests took a year to fill, but the F.B.I. put several hundred agents on the case last summer

and the waiting time is now about one month.

Under the law, Government agencies may withhold information for several reasons, including the protection of current investigations and the privacy of third parties. Critics contend that these exemptions are often abused, and Marcus Topel, one of the lawyers for Mr. Cleaver, said that dozens of pages had been completely blacked out except for his client's name.

"It strikes me as the height of irony," the lawyer added, "that they are not giving us information to protect some-

one's privacy, while their investigation itself was an incredibly gross invasion of privacy. It's a classic case of doublethink."

According to a spokesman, the bureau has liberalized its policies since last May, when Attorney General Griffin B. Bell ordered Government agencies to release any information that was not "demonstrably harmful." But many applicants are still not satisfied, and about 170 requests that could not be resolved by negotiation are now before Federal courts.

One problem, said the spokesman,

is that many investigations center on an event, not an individual, and release of the records could harm others. "The public doesn't have enough appreciation for what's contained in an investigatory record," the spokesman said.

Many applicants are astounded at the trivia they find in their files. Nina Totenberg, a reporter for National Public Radio, said that her dossier was full of memorandums reporting her efforts to research a profile of the late J. Edgar Hoover.

"As a taxpayer, I'm outraged," said Mrs. Totenberg. "If the F.B.I. spent as-



Representative Robert F. Drinan, foreground, examining his F.B.I. file in the bureau's reading room.

The New York Times/George Tames

much time catching crooks as they do writing memos, they'd solve the whole Federal crime problem."

Still, it is nice to be noticed. David Burnham, a New York Times reporter, says he is going to frame an F.B.I. report that calls him a "troublemaker" who reaches "conclusions without factual basis." Mr. Burnham, who is white, finds it amusing that the report accusing him of inaccuracy describes him as "colored."

Some file readers get an eerie feeling when they realize how closely their activities have been monitored. Senator Robert Morgan, Democrat of North Carolina, found long reports on the annual meetings of state attorneys general. An aide said that the Senator, a former attorney general, "finds it offensive when anyone checks on you when you haven't done anything."

The worst feeling is to be ignored. Emile De Antonjo, a noted film maker and outspoken Marxist, was insulted when he realized that his radical career had rated only perfunctory attention by the F.B.I. "I cannot believe," he said, "that someone could do all that I've done without incurring at least a cursory investigation by a paranoid lunatic like Mr. Hoover."

One West Coast activist asked for his records and offered to pay \$200 toward the cost of duplicating the file. Since the Government charges 10 cents a page, the applicant expected quite a haul. But the bureau told him that he was not on file.

"He was really shocked," said the activist's lawyer. "I told him they might have made a mistake, just to soften the blow."

Such deprived persons have one consolation: The F.B.I. opens a file on anyone who asks to see one.