

What Our FBI Files Tell About the FBI

*'Vacuum Cleaner' Approach
Called Sloppy, Amateur*

By Amitai Etzioni

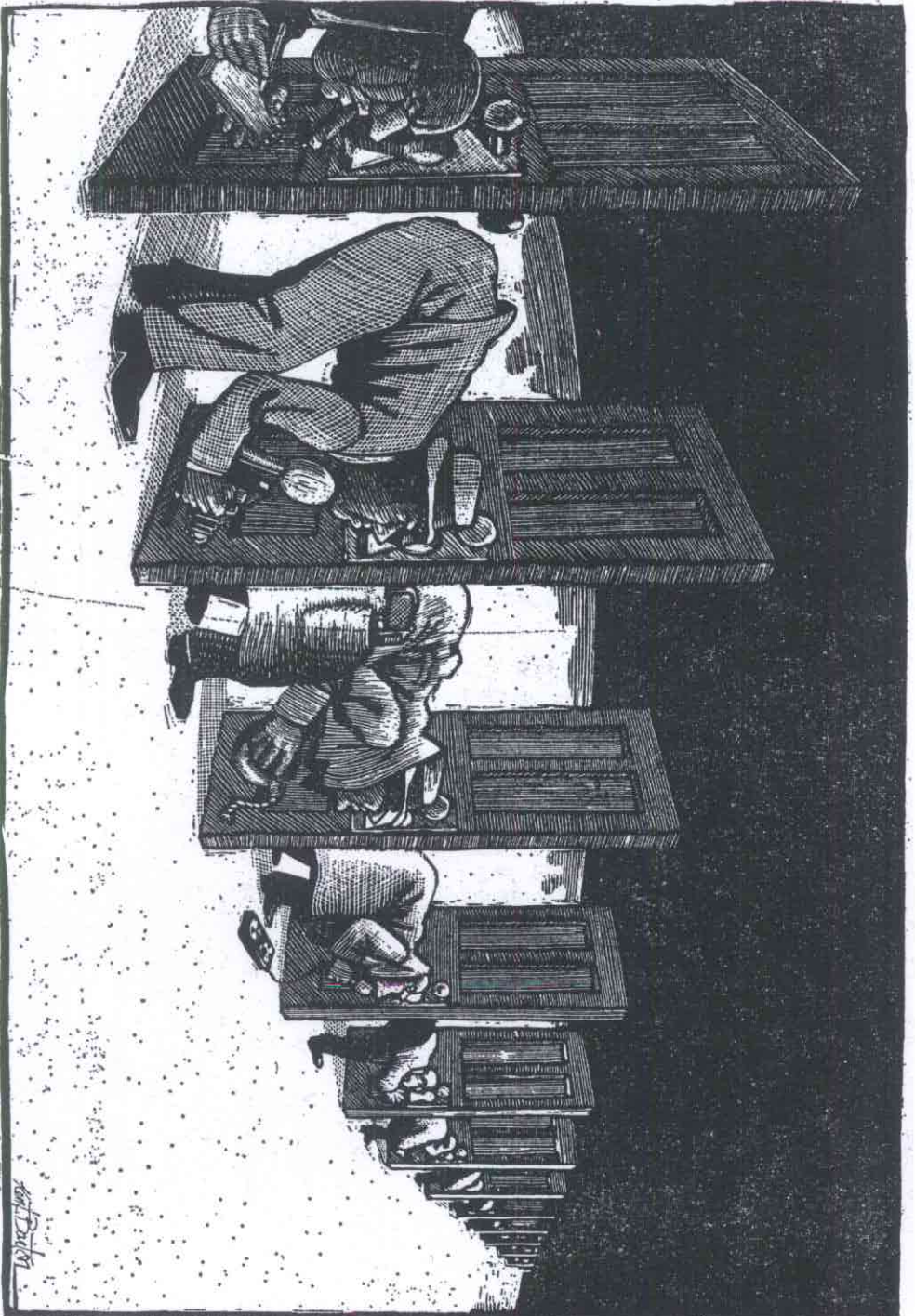
*Etzioni is professor of sociology at Columbia University and director
of the Center for Social Research in New York.*

I DO NOT KNOW who started it, but in 1972 the Federal Bureau of Investigation conducted a lengthy inquiry into my past. Someone had charged that "Etzioni had made statements critical of the United States' foreign policy, that he had defended the position of Red China and the Soviet Union, and had made unwarranted accusations against the military and intelligence organizations of the United States."

That kind of accusation evidently was considered

enough to set off a police investigation into my political views. The result was a dossier sent on Nov. 2, 1972, by L. Patrick Gray, then acting director of the FBI, to an unidentified "Deputy Assistant to the President, the White House."

The investigation ranged widely. FBI agents interviewed at least 10 of my colleagues at Columbia University and elsewhere, three or more of my neighbors, officials at government agencies where I have been a con-



By Kent Barton in The Miami Herald

sultant, and eight employees of the research center indirect. They searched through police files, newspaper morgues and credit agency records and checked files on me at other federal agencies, including the Central Intelligence Agency, the Air Force counter-intelligence office and the United States Information Agency. Reports were received from FBI bureaus in New York, Washington, San Francisco, St. Louis, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati and Columbus, Ohio.

But the investigation tells more about the FBI and other intelligence agencies than it does about me. What it shows, judging by extensive if incomplete files obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, is the remarkable sloppiness of the agencies, an amateurism in gathering and weighing information that one would not accept from a college freshman.

See INTELLIGENCE, Page B4

INTELLIGENCE, From Page B1

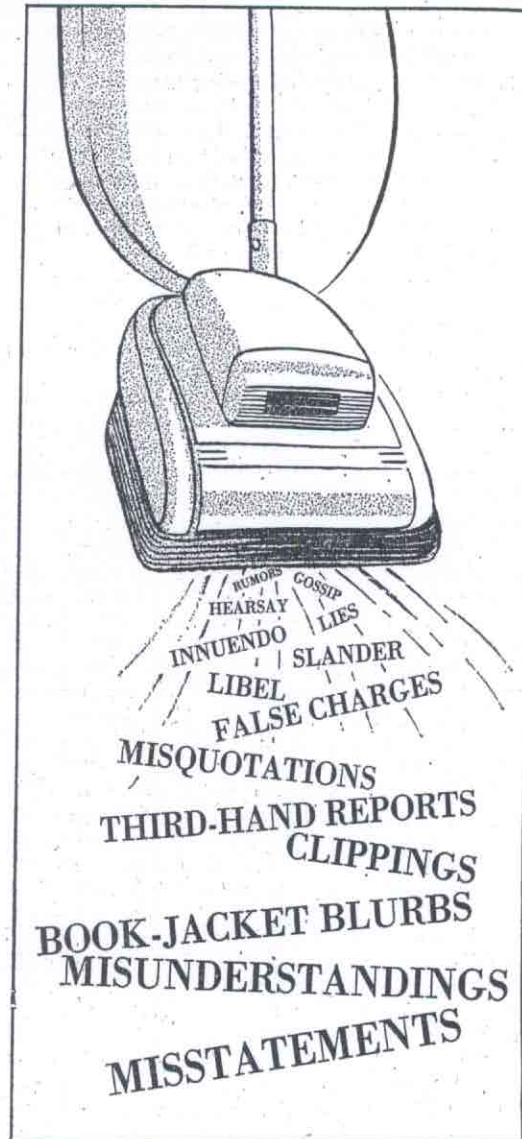
This sloppiness shows up in an array of basic mistakes and in a broader mindlessness. The files identify me as an associate professor of Israeli and Jewish studies, which I never have been. They depict my Ph.D. as being in Soviet relations when it actually was in the sociology of Israeli kibbutzim, or communal settlements. They characterize my books based on the jacket "blurbs" prepared by publishers' marketing departments. Perhaps most mindlessly of all, they tend to confuse those who may oppose some specific U.S. policies — as I, along with many others, certainly have done on various occasions — with others who oppose the United States itself. A little oversight, no doubt.

These are unsettling flaws for intelligence agencies to have. Where government decisions are concerned, they create serious doubts about the information on which important policies may be based. Where individuals are involved, they raise not only the long-debated issue of when people become appropriate targets of investigation, but whether the agencies are capable at all of making reasonably accurate assessments and how often they fill their files with second-hand nonsense. (The legalism cited to justify an investigation in my case was that I spent three days a year as an adviser to a Department of Health, Education and Welfare committee; it reviews grant allocations for mental health research and needs "secure" people as much as the Audubon Society does.)

The temptation is to explain these flaws as aberrations, as reflecting the special circumstances — Vietnam, campus unrest, White House paranoia — of 1972. But only recently John Seigenthaler, publisher of The (Nashville) Tennessean, discovered and voluntarily disclosed that his excised FBI files contain a report just from last year with a fragmented sentence stating: "allegations of Seigenthaler having illicit relations with young girls, which information source obtained from an unnamed source." Seigenthaler, himself a former high Justice Department official, not only brands that third-hand allegation as absolutely untrue, but he says that "for years the FBI has been engaged in a 'vacuum cleaner' approach to intelligence gathering," that "agents will solicit or accept any information, even hearsay, rumor or gossip, and put it into the bureau's raw files."

Perhaps with a former judge who knows how to evaluate evidence scheduled to take over the FBI, things might change at least at that agency. But the root of the problem is that while intelligence agencies may pass information around privately among themselves and to some others, they rarely have to undergo the kind of public scrutiny of their works that helps keep scholars, journalists, attorneys, students and others on their toes. That makes for a persistent likelihood of irresponsible intelligence-gathering and for a continuing need to disclose such irresponsibility for its own sake whenever it occurs.

THERE IS NO LACK of unintelligent intelligence in my own files. The Air Force counter-intelligence office, for example, refers to a group of scholars which I



The Washington Post

organized in the late 1960s as a "pacifist" organization. That is silly. The group was organized to search for peace as a middle road between the extremes of either nuclear war or surrender to the Communist bloc. The distinction between "peace" and "pacifism" may be too subtle for whoever wrote that, but pacifism refers to those who have sought unilateral disarmament by the West, while the peace movement has included groups of a wide range of persuasions. "Peace" even appears on the gates of the headquarters of the Air Force's Strategic Air Command in Nebraska, where it says, "Peace Is Our Business." The Air Force presumably would object violently to changing that to read "Pacifism Is Our Business."

But the FBI appears determined to suggest in part

that I am a pacifist. The synopsis of the agency's report to the White House, for example, states that Etzioni, "in his writing and teaching, suggested step by step disarmament." It then merely cites, presumably as supporting evidence, a New York Times report on the founding of the same group of scholars, called Gradualist Way to Peace. (It says the article was published on Sept. 3, 1971, which is just a little bit off — it was actually published four years earlier.)

As it turns out, the FBI never read my writings, and there is no reason to believe it knows anything about what I teach in class. The agency appears to have deliberately avoided actually reading my books on subjects it was interested in, including communism, U.S.-Soviet relations, the arms race and the peace movement. In a Dec. 29, 1971, memo to five FBI bureaus, the Director of the FBI said: "Investigation should include identifying

books and articles . . . In connection with the books, New York should obtain book reviews . . ." The New York agent dutifully reported that my "primary thesis was contained in the books, 'The Hard Way to Peace' and 'Winning Without War,' " and he decided that on the whole they had been favorably reviewed. In addition, the FBI cites the advertising on the book jacket. That is it.

While FBI agents are not expected to be scholars, if they are reporting on an individual's views it would be nice if they read those views. If they had, they would have known that I have not merely been for "disarmament," but for mutual disarmament by both sides, which increasingly has become U.S. government policy since the Cold War years when those books were written.

Indeed, as a member of an earlier group of scholars critical of the escalating arms race, I approached the

What Our FBI Files Tell About the FBI



United Press International

At work compiling data in an FBI office.

U.S. and Soviet delegations to the 1963 disarmament negotiations in Geneva with a proposal for a psychological cooling-off and mutual arms reduction, as detailed in 1962 in "The Hard Way to Peace." The FBI seems entirely unaware of this effort, and the separate CIA file on me is so replete with deletions that I cannot tell what they know.

IF THE FBI WAS seeking to test my loyalty, there was another incident which it was well aware of but which never found its way into the final report to the White House.

On Dec. 13, 1964, I had published an article in The New York Times Magazine critical of a plan to establish a joint American-European nuclear force, known as the Multilateral Nuclear Force, because it would give the West Germans a finger on the trigger of U.S. nuclear forces and escalate East-West tensions.

Shortly afterward, Bogdan Walewski, the second secretary of the Polish mission to the United Nations, came to my Columbia University study. He talked about the situation in the world, the Soviet interest in peace and other general subjects. I could not understand what he wanted.

He returned for another visit on Jan. 13, 1965, and asked me if, in view of my Jewish background and my anti-German feelings, I would help him find out what the current status of the Multilateral Nuclear Force was. I explained I knew no more about it than what was in the newspapers. "Yes," he replied, "but Professor Neustadt does." My Columbia colleague, Richard Neustadt, had just returned from Europe where he had conducted a study of the Multilateral Nuclear Force which was for President Johnson's eyes only. I told Walewski I knew nothing about it and was not going to find out. He then asked me to keep his request "off the record." I said I couldn't and wouldn't. He left unhappy.

I wrote the FBI to report the incident the same day. An agent contacted me, asking if I would try to entrap Walewski by feeding him material provided by the FBI. I refused on the ground that such an act would destroy my role as a member of a community of scholars working for international peace, credible to both sides, hired by none. The FBI agent left unhappy.

The FBI thereafter conducted a limited investigation of me. That report, dated April 13, 1965, concluded: "The Bureau has been advised there is no unfavorable information concerning Etzioni, and available information indicates, in fact, that he is anti-Communist." When the more extensive investigation was undertaken in 1972, my refusal of the invitation to spy for the Communist camp naturally surfaced. But there is a notation in the New York part of my file not to pass this information to Washington. No reasons are cited.

MY REFUSAL TO SPY for U.S. intelligence agencies seems to have dismayed others as well. In the final FBI report, a section titled "Critical of U.S. Intelligence" notes my opposition to the CIA's use of campus facilities. This was an issue in the late 1960s, and it surfaced again

last year with Senate Intelligence Committee disclosures that several hundred academics are engaged in clandestine CIA activities. As the leading organization of U.S. professors told the CIA last May, "A government which corrupts its colleges and universities by making political fronts of them has betrayed academic freedom and compromised all who teach."

But what is most notable about the section on my criticism of U.S. intelligence agencies is the report of a 1963 debate I participated in at Swarthmore College. There I did confront, on Feb. 13, 1965, William Kintner, a retired U.S. Army officer believed by some of my colleagues to be a retired CIA officer. He and I did not get along at all, to put it mildly.

The FBI report on the meeting, filed two months later, depicts me as favoring nothing less than "the abolition of the Atlantic Alliance" and "claiming that the military

shoring up of Europe was tied in with West Germany and therefore everything the Russians did was purely for defensive purposes." A report from one informant says that while most of the debate was "within propriety," one statement was "disloyal." This statement which I am supposed to have uttered is: "We have special forces teaching how to incinerate nuns in Vietnam." A second informant, however, recalled my words somewhat differently. According to him, I had made a statement "indicating the CIA [was] supplying tanks to shoot down Peruvian women."

I do not recall the exact words I spoke in criticizing the CIA 12 years ago, but both of those versions are absurd. Nonetheless, the FBI used such raw and contradictory reports from informants to support a conclusion which has me claiming that the CIA "was guilty of everything the Soviet Union was doing." That conclusion was made of whole cloth.

That is the general pattern of the entire FBI report: "cutting and pasting" undigested and often questionable material and drawing sweeping conclusions. The FBI does not know for a fact anything but my name. Of everything else it can only say that some unevaluated item was "reported by" a newspaper, a campus magazine, an informant or an interviewee.

IDON'T KNOW WHAT effect the FBI report may have had on my work with the government, but it surely cut into an audience of mine in Frankfurt. In what must have been a moment of confusion, the University of Frankfurt in West Germany decided to add to the afflictions of its students by inviting me to deliver a lecture. This might not have involved the powers of the U.S. government if my colleagues in Frankfurt had not been too enterprising: They had asked that the lecture be delivered at the *Amerika Haus*. They probably assumed that a lecture hall maintained by the USIA to improve German-American cultural contracts was a proper locale.

What they did not know was that the scheduling clerk of *Amerika Haus* is concerned with more than assigning rooms and providing chalk. He also "clears" lecturers with Washington.

At USIA headquarters, a review of my record was

undertaken, using information from the House Un-American Activities Committee, the FBI and other sources. It established that while I was not a security risk, my attitude toward U.S. foreign policy was "critical" and "negative." Thus, on Sept. 2, 1966, Bonn was cabled that "on basis of available information agency advises against lecture use of Amitai Etzioni."

It was a 1½ years later before another cable was sent on this matter: "Security office needs know if post used Amitai Etzioni which was subject adverse agency recommendation re appearance 1966-67. Advise soonest." Bonn responded that, by and large, they did "adhere to the agency's advice," but in my case "while USIA Bonn recognized that the professor was not an approved speaker, we also had to contend with the fact that he was the invited guest of the university and that the invitation to him had been made and accepted without our knowledge months before the date of the lecture. The post felt that cancellation of his appearance might seriously threaten our relationship with the university. USIA Bonn therefore gave the Amerika Haus Frankfurt a one-time approval with the understanding that *no special effort should be made to attract a large audience* (italics added).

A year later a request at the USIA to repint an article of mine from Science magazine, and later one from The New York Times Magazine, was turned down on the same grounds. The first article dealt with the biological and sociological issues raised by parents' choosing the sex of their offspring. The second, entitled "Confessions of a Professor Caught in a Radical Revolution," was critical of student violence at Columbia.

After getting these files, I wrote to the newly designated director the USIA, John E. Reinhardt. A few weeks later he wrote back to assure me that "no 'blacklist' of unapproved lecturers is in existence, and none will be kept in the future. It is true that in the past routine checks were conducted on prospective lecturers, but this practice was discontinued several months ago. I am in agreement with you about the nature of the information contained in your file."

He added, "Whatever has occurred in the past, I assure you that I agree with you that the views of the 'loyal opposition' must be reflected in USIA's programs. That your ideas have become widely accepted is ample evidence of the value of open debate in our society."

I do not know what is being done with files on me at other agencies. At the FBI, I assume, somebody will clip this article and paste it together with others showing how terribly critical I am of U.S. intelligence agencies. But if these agencies are to perform their tasks well, there are few things they need more than criticism of sloppy ways.