

FBI Compiled File on W. Va.

The Charleston Gazette
For The Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W. Va., Nov. 27— FBI documents obtained by The Charleston Gazette under the Freedom of Information Act show that the bureau has a file of more than 100 pages on the newspaper, including a copy of a Gazette letter to a Communist newspaper in Germany that was copied by Army intelligence.

It took the Gazette nearly a year to find out the file existed. The FBI has permitted the newspaper to see 112 pages of the file. Many of the pages had words and sentences blacked out.

"Excisions have been made from these documents," said FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley in a letter to the Gazette. "And other documents have been withheld in their entirety . . ."

Kelley said the reason for the blanks and the withheld pages was to protect personal privacy, confidentiality of FBI informants and internal rules and practices of the bureau.

The Gazette has appealed to Attorney General Edward H. Levi for full disclosure. No response has been received.

The FBI declined to comment on the Gazette file and also declined to say whether the bureau had similar files on other newspapers.

The pages released from the Gazette file are code-numbered and initialed, with footnotes and cross references.

Many deal with trivial matters going back four decades. They include letters from the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover written in the 1930s, thanking the Gazette for editorials that called him "Policeman No. 1."

The pages also include reports to Hoover from FBI agents concerning their visits to the Gazette newsroom and their assessment of which editors were "friendly" to the FBI. In addition, the file contains reports on Gazette activities during the McCarthy era, when the newspaper opposed the national hunt for "subversives."

Whenever a Gazette editorial or column was critical of the FBI, agents sent teletype messages marked "urgent" to the director. Notes evaluating Gazette staff members were added to the messages and the newspaper was removed from the FBI mailing list.

The file shows that various persons wrote to the FBI warning of leftist tendencies in the Gazette and they received letters of thanks signed by Hoover, along with copies of his anti-Communist pamphlets.

A 1959 FBI appraisal of the Gazette, according to the file, says: "This paper has a history of being on the 'liberal' side and as being flippant in its attitude."

Long-time editor Harry G. Hoffmann, now retired, is analyzed repeatedly. A 1963 FBI memo calls him a "scurrifous character."

Of publisher W. E. "Ned" Chilton III a 1967 memo says: "Mr. and Mrs. Ned Chilton have not been the subjects of an investigation by the FBI," but adds that Chilton writes some editorials "in praise of Red China" and other editorials "highly critical of the American Legion and the FBI."

The file reveals that various Gazette reporters were rebuffed when they requested police or crime reports from the FBI and that agents sought information on the reporters.

In 1964, for example, reporter Edward Peeks asked the Atlanta FBI bureau for data on police brutality against blacks in the South, but did not receive it. The file shows that Atlanta sent a message to Washington and received a memo from Hoover's office saying:

"Captioned newspaper has been consistently hostile to the bureau over the years. You should, therefore, fur-

Newspaper Over 4 Decades

nish no information or assistance to Mr. Edward Peeks or any other employee of this newspaper." A copy of the memo went to the Pittsburgh FBI office, which supervises West Virginia.

The sole entry in the released pages since Hoover's death is a 1974 letter to the newspaper from Kelly alleging inaccuracies in an editorial.

The Gazette's request for the file started with a comment by Rep. Ken Hechler (D-W.Va.), who suggested to Chilton that the FBI probably had a file on the publisher and the paper.

Chilton sent a formal request to the FBI in 1975, under the Freedom of Information Act, which allows public access to most federal records. He asked for any file on him or the Gazette.

A month later, he received a reply, signed by Kelley, saying that no search could be made without a full biography of Chilton. The biography was sent, but nothing happened for nine months, despite a provision in the law saying federal agencies must grant or deny requests within 10 working days.

Chilton wrote again in August, 1976, and in September, got a letter from Kelley, acknowledging that the FBI had a file on the Gazette and would

soon release copies of "documents subject to disclosure."

In addition, the Army Intelligence Agency notified the newspaper that a document about the Gazette that had "originated within the Army" had been returned by the FBI. Army intelligence said the document was classified "confidential" and could not be released "because disclosure could reasonably be expected to cause damage to the national security."

The newspaper appealed to the Secretary of the Army who reversed the intelligence agency, declassified the document and sent a copy to the Gazette in October. The document was a 1952 report from "Source (blank)" in Germany saying that a Communist newspaper had received a letter from the Gazette.

The report quoted the entire Gazette letter, which asked various foreign newspapers for copies to be displayed at a West Virginia fair.

Kelley forwarded the Gazette records in October. Among the reports:

• In 1940, an agent reported to Hoover that the Charleston Daily Mail had given better news coverage to an FBI training school for policemen than the Gazette. The agent said he

visited the Gazette newsroom in an attempt to improve the situation and later mailed Hoover three "editorials favorable to the bureau," which he implied appeared as a result of his efforts.

• In 1957, a Gazette editorial said Hoover failed to grasp the meaning of democracy. The special agent in charge of the Pittsburgh office sent Hoover a memo recounting previous Gazette criticism of the FBI and saying it was doubtful the editor at that time, Hoffmann, "can be straightened out properly." The director of the Pittsburgh office recommended Hoffmann be dropped from the FBI mailing list.

• In 1961, an FBI memo said that "the bureau enjoyed cordial relations with the Gazette prior to 1953," but since then the paper had "viciously attacked the director and the FBI."

• In 1963, five Gazette editorials were reported to Hoover by the Pittsburgh office. One memo said of Hoffmann: "From past experience with this scurrilous character, it is obvious that any efforts to straighten him out would only add fuel to the fire." A handwritten note added: "I agree. Hoffmann is no good."