

F.B.I. Releases Most Files on Its Programs to Disrupt Dissident Groups

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 21—The Federal Bureau of Investigation released today 53,000 heavily edited pages of heretofore secret files on its 15-year counterintelligence programs against domestic dissidents. The documents contained many new details of bureau operations, but few apparent new disclosures of abuses.

The papers were released in response to a request filed under the Freedom of Information Act by eight Washington correspondents for various publications. It was the largest single outpouring of documents from the bureau to date; within 10 days, however, the F.B.I. is scheduled to release about 80,000 pages of files from its investigation of the assassination of President Kennedy.

Today's release, made without official bureau comment, dealt with so-called "CoinTelpro" operations between 1956 and March 1971, in which the bureau actively sought to undermine the activities of dissident political groups.

A survey of the documents found the following highlights:

¶In an effort to obtain the dismissal of a teacher at a New Jersey state college, the bureau's New York field office sent an anonymous letter to the educational authorities charging that the teacher, a political dissident, had a sexual liaison with his 13-year-old stepdaughter.

¶In California, in an attempt to disrupt a radical antiwar group called the Revolutionary Union, the bureau had an informant

pose as a Chinese Communist agent and tell one leader of the group, Bruce Howard Franklin, that another, Liebel Bergman, was an informant. Violence later marked the union's activities.

¶The bureau considered setting up its own radical group, as a cover, that would have been "militant Negro, pro-Chinese Communist, antiwar, peace, pro-Arab or new left oriented." Several field offices reported they did not have informants to fit these varied ideologies and the plan seems to have fizzled.

¶Under the same "special operations" program, it considered setting up a stamp collection club that would specialize in Chinese Communist stamps as a cover for intelligence operations.

¶The bureau conducted extensive operations in Mexico to undermine Communist groups there that it said might filter across the border. This newly disclosed operation seems to conflict with the assignment of the Central Intelligence Agency, which is charged with carrying out covert activities abroad.

80 Percent of Files

¶During the antiwar period, agents in Ohio prepared to run a campaign to ruin Antioch College's reputation for a "scholarly environment" but dropped the project because of an item critical of Antioch that was broadcast by NBC.

The files made public today were about 80 percent of the total amassed on the CoinTelpro operations, according to a bureau spokesman. Of 68,000 pages of files, 53,000 were released.

Material was deleted or documents

were withheld under provisions of the Freedom of Information Act that allow Government agencies to keep certain actions and memorandums secret.

The decision to hold back material can be appealed in court, however.

The entire 68,000 pages were reviewed by investigators for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in 1975, according to a bureau spokesman. The committee's 1975 hearings disclosed a pattern of bureau activities in which it sought to harass or confuse domestic dissidents by spreading derogatory information about them, thereby causing dissension among their families and friends or political associates.

Puerto Rican Target

The survey of the newly released documents did not show any incident in which an F.B.I. agent took part in, paid for or advocated violence against a political dissident. But there are incidents in which the bureau tried to cause disharmony in radical political groups with an eye to fomenting violence.

For instance, in operations against Puerto Rican nationalist groups, the bureau made an effort to promote ill feeling between two factions that "would perhaps provoke further physical violence between members of these groups."

In the same operation they sent a letter to one group member "known to be extremely sensitive to criticism and prone to violence." The letter, the documents show, was "calculated to infuriate" its recipient.

As was noted in the 1975 Senate hearings, there was an undercurrent of sexual blackmail in the bureau's activities. In addition to the incident involving the unnamed New Jersey teacher, the Chicago field office once contemplated releasing information that several leaders of the Students for a Democratic Society had venereal disease.

The 53,000 pages that became public today form the most complete history of CoinTelpro, which was begun in 1956 as part of efforts to curtail the activities of the Communist Party in the United States.

Among these early efforts were the

spreading of reports that certain Communist leaders were secretly living in luxury and the disruption of a picnic of Communist Party members at Lake Minnetonka, near Minneapolis, by persuading anti-Communist students to picket the crowd.

Klan Was Infiltrated

When the bureau was ordered to control the activities of the militant segregationists of the Ku Klux Klan, it drew upon the methods it had used against the Communist Party. At one point it had so completely infiltrated the Klan that it considered installing its own imperial wizard so as to have an informant at the top.

As the Vietnam War heated up and the antiwar movement formed, the bureau turned its CoinTelpro methods on these organizations. The papers released today spanned a substantial number of groups.

The bureau had CoinTelpros against Yugoslavian groups, Cuban groups and the Socialist Workers Party, as well as the Puerto Rican nationalists, left-leaning antiwar radicals, black extremist groups and white militants. There was no clear formula that caused a particular group to become a target, though only one traditional criminal organization was ever involved.

There is a consistent trend throughout the documents of direct or indirect use of the news media. In one instance the documents make it appear that the former No. 2 man in the bureau, Cartha DeLoach, could arrange to have a California paper interview a Communist Party member.

In the Klan files there are several reports of leaking anti-Klan stories to certain news reporters. There is no new evidence that reporters were on the F.B.I. payroll.

The Freedom of Information suit on CoinTelpro was pressed in 1975 by Orin Kelly, then with The Washington Star; Margaret Gentry of The Associated Press; Stephen Lesher, then of Newsweek magazine; John Crowdsen of The New York Times; Robert Kutner, then of The Washington Post; Thomas Stewart of Reuters and Michael Lynch of The Wall Street Journal.