

FBI defense funds

WASHINGTON (AP) — Political conservatives and former FBI agents have raised nearly a half million dollars to pay legal fees for John J. Kearney, the one-time bureau supervisor who faces trial in October, and dozens of other FBI men.

But the fund-raising effort may be hitting a snag because of confusion about the various groups soliciting donations.

Only two groups are soliciting contributions specifically for the legal defense of Kearney and other present or former FBI agents involved in the Justice Department investigation of FBI burglaries, mail-opening and wiretapping.

But other organizations, such as the American Legion and the Young Americans for Freedom, have declared support for Kearney.

And the newly formed Security and Intelligence Fund has solicited contributions with a letter implying that the

money will be used for Kearney's defense, although that's not necessarily so.

This has caused consternation among potential contributors who have received three different appeals for money and have heard other groups publicly declare support for Kearney, said John O'Beirne, chairman of the Washington chapter of the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI.

Kearney was charged with directing illegal mail opening and wiretapping in the search for Weather Underground fugitives in New York from 1970 through 1972. He has pleaded innocent.

The 7,000-member national society has a legal defense fund, and this is the only organization which actually receives and pays the legal bills. O'Beirne has been organizing the effort and acting as liaison with the other groups.

"The overlapping and duplication in solicitation letters has caused us a little bit of a problem, but we hope we're working it out," he said in an interview.

Through its regular newsletters, the society has solicited contributions from its members, who have donated \$290,000 so far, O'Beirne said. "We've already paid out over \$110,000 of that to cover the defense of some 47 individuals," he continued.

The Ad Hoc Citizens Legal Defense Fund for the FBI has raided \$180,000 from about 10,000 persons during the past seven weeks, said its administrative director, Marvin Liebman.

Liebman operates the fund out of his New York public relations office. The fund was created by three prominent conservative Republicans — former Treasury Secretary William E. Simon, former Sen. James Buckley, Con. R.-N.Y., and former Ambassador Clare Boothe Luce.

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Liebman said the money he collects, minus mailing and other costs, will be turned over to the society of ex-agents.

Most of the confusion arose from the solicitation letter mailed by the Security and Intelligence Fund to more than 100,000 persons since early June.

James Angleton, the former counterintelligence chief of the CIA who was ousted in the wake of disclosures of improper CIA activities, is chairman of the fund and one of its founders.

The fund president is retired Ambassador Elbridge Durbrow, and the secretary-treasurer is retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Robert C. Richardson. The three make up the fund's board of directors.

"Kearney's defense is our defense!" the solicitation letter proclaimed. "We've set up the Security and Intelligence Fund to defend John Kearney

and any others in the intelligence community who have served their country in the line of duty and may now be forced to use their life savings to defend themselves."

But Richardson said the letter was designed to win public support and money for establishing the group as a permanent effort to campaign for strong intelligence agencies.

"We will donate to the Kearney defense fund if they ask us and if it's necessary," Richardson added.

Richardson, O'Beirne and Liebman met last week to discuss the confusion the intelligence fund letter had created. They agreed that the next intelligence fund letters will not stress the Kearney case.

Richardson described the intelligence fund as an outgrowth of the American Security Council and it operates out of the council's Washington office. The

council is a right-wing group which urges a strong military. Richardson and Durbrow have been affiliated with the council for years.

Kearney's trial on charges of conspiracy, mail-opening and wiretapping begins in New York in October. Edward Bennett Williams, a high-priced Washington criminal lawyer, is expected to lead the defense.

O'Beirne said he expects Kearney's legal bill to exceed \$100,000.

In addition, the national society fund is paying the legal bills for 46 other agents who have retained private attorneys because they were questioned by department prosecutors or grand juries or believed they might be a target of the investigation.

O'Beirne said the fund is trying to pay 75 per cent of each agent's legal expenses. It may pay the entire bill if enough money is raised.