

FBI mailed letters home on campus radicals

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Capitol Hill News Service
Washington

The parents of an Illinois State University student received an anonymous — and disturbing — letter seven years ago.

The letter was about their daughter. It told how the girl was living in a house with an older man, who was an ex-convict. The man's wife lived downstairs. The author told how her own daughter had been in similar circumstances and ended up living a life of drugs and prostitution.

The letter appeared to be from a concerned parent. It actually was written by the Springfield field office of the FBI as part of a campaign to harass, intimidate and discredit campus radicals during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Previously classified documents about the campaign — known as the Counterintelligence Program (Cointelpro) — were released this week under the Freedom of Information Act. The documents show that through his Springfield Field Office the FBI closely monitored "new

left" activity on downstate campuses including Illinois State at Normal, the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, and several others.

While radical activities on these campuses may not have been as widespread as elsewhere in the country, the documents show the FBI nonetheless kept close tabs on students who were involved and sent information it did learn to the U.S. Attorney's Office in Springfield, Air Force intelligence at Chanute, military intelligence in Eyanston, and other government agencies, including FBI Washington.

At Champaign-Urbana, for instance, the Springfield office supplied these agencies with detailed accounts on "the ring leaders" of four student groups: Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the University of Illinois Committee to End the War in Vietnam, the Young Socialists for Halstead-Boutells, and the Champaign-Urbana Draft Resistance Union.

In a then classified report entitled "New Left Activity, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana," dated July 1968, the FBI related personal backgrounds, physical descriptions, academic interests and campus political activities of student leaders of these groups.

All names have been deleted from the released documents. The Springfield office also tried to stifle left-wing activity by seeking out student informants, distributing anti-new left material to "friendly" news media and school administrators and, in one in-

stance at SIU in Carbondale, making plans to inform the school's Board of Trustees about supposed links between campus radicals and communists.

Also included in the FBI's plans, according to the documents, was a proposal to make "pretext calls" on members of the New Left who are "obviously of weak character" advising them that group leaders are law enforcement informants.

Another proposal was to "conduct neighborhood investigations" of new left leaders. "During interviews,

the question of the (in-

dividual's) personal loyalty to the United States Government and his attitude toward Communism could be interjected causing doubt and unrest" in the minds of his neighbors, one document states.

How many of these proposals

were actually carried out is unclear from the documents. They have been heavily censored and many have been deleted entirely. But the nature of the campaign is illustrated by the letter sent to the parents of the Illinois State student.

M.H.W. 11/15/72