

King Adviser Says FBI 'Used' Him

By Don Oberdorfer
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Stanley Levison, the New York civil rights activist secretly cited by the FBI in allegations that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was under Communist influence, says he was merely an FBI "scapegoat."

Levison spoke up in a telephone interview last week after being identified in press reports as the "mysterious political influence" whose name the FBI had used in warnings to the highest officials of the Kennedy administration more than a decade ago.

Now in poor health and retired from most business and civic activity, Levison said the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's "primary objective was to 'get' Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. My conclusion is that I was a scapegoat Hoover was using for this purpose."

New information about the FBI warnings—and the wiretapping and bugging of King—surfaced in the current Senate intelligence committee hearings.

The details of the FBI's allegations against Levison have never been made public. Various reports have quoted the FBI as claiming that a mysterious "secret Communist" close to King was a danger to national security.

"I was never a member of the Communist Party," said Levison. "I did know some people who were . . . Par-

ticularly in the 1930s and 1940s you scarcely could have been an intellectual in New York without knowing some."

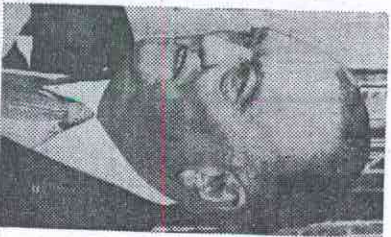
Levison said the charges against him were a case of "guilt by association" compounded by allegations from a former business associate who falsely named other persons as "secret Communists" in order to clear himself.

Levison, who is 63, calls himself "a political kind of person." He was a prominent member of a New York businessmen's committee for the re-election of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1944 and at various times a vice president of the Metropolitan New York Council of the American Jewish Congress, treasurer of an Episcopal Church magazine called The Churchman, an adviser in the organizing efforts of the New York Hospital Workers Union and a guiding force behind the New York Citizen's Inquiry on Parole and Criminal Justice. He has also been an attorney, a real estate man, a Ford Motor Co. dealer and in the import-export business among others.

His most noteworthy activity, as a friend, financial backer and adviser of the late Dr. King, began during the days of the Montgomery bus boycott 20 years ago. Levison was introduced to King by Bayard Rustin, a black leader in New York. Levison did free legal work for King, and devised fund-raising appeals for King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference.



MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.
.. rejected warning



J. EDGAR HOOVER
.. said out to "get" King

Rep. Andrew Young (D-Ga.) recalls that King arranged for him to be interviewed by Levison before hiring him as an SCLC aide in the early 1960s. When President Kennedy warned King about the relationship with Levison in a White House Rose Garden conversation in 1963, King assigned Young to find out from Justice Department officials the details of the "threat" which Levison was thought to pose.

Despite the warnings—which arose from FBI reports—neither senior Justice Department officials nor anyone else could produce any hard information against Levison, Young recalled. King flatly disbelieved the allegations, according to Young.

"We knew what communism was. There had never been anything in his (Levison's) influence on the movement that suggested anything more radical than we were suggesting ourselves . . . If anything, he was a conservative influence. He was very cautious about becoming involved with the war in Vietnam, for example," Young said.

Levison said he refused on Fifth Amendment grounds to answer questions in a closed session of the Senate Internal Security Committee in 1962. Levison said he did so because he feared the session—evidently based on his former business associate's charges—would amount to an attack on King.

In fact, he said, King's name never came up at the hearing, which centered on the names

of New York lawyers—many unknown to him. A spokesman for the Senate committee could find no record of the Levison hearing in a search of committee files last week.

Despite lack of evidence, King terminated his relations with Levison for a time after Kennedy's warnings. After a few months, however, King began calling on Levison for advice again. According to Levison, King said the breaking off of relations had been "a mistake."

King's resumed relationship with Levison is believed to have been cited by the FBI when it obtained approval from Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy in October, 1963, for wiretaps on King. The Senate intelligence committee published documents leading to this conclusion, though Levison's name was deleted.

Levison said he did not believe his own telephone had been routinely tapped, nor did the FBI ever interview him. "I was in the telephone book—both my business and residence. But nobody was sent to see me."

The New York attorney said Hoover was only interested in him as a means for attacking King. "You remember when Hoover called King 'a notorious liar' . . . Well, I'm delighted that now the Senate hearings have disclosed it was Hoover that was a notorious liar rather than Martin Luther King," Levison declared.