

When the FBI Calls, Everyone Talks

Jack Anderson

WHEN THE FBI's relentless sleuths fix their attention on a culprit, real or imagined, few sources of information are considered too personal or sacred for exploitation.

Neighbors, friends, ex-spouses, building superintendents, college officials, even newspaper reporters are plumbed for tidbits of gossip. Surprisingly, most of them become positively garrulous in the presence of a G-man.

Military records, Selective Service records, passport, customs, Social Security and even Internal Revenue files, which the hapless citizen thinks are confidential, are actually wide open to the federal cops.

The FBI has used these sources to dig out strictly personal information about a variety of public figures who have not committed crimes and aren't ever likely to do so.

For example, the FBI wrangled information about black leader Ralph David Abernathy from an intriguing cross section of sources. Abernathy succeeded the martyred Martin Luther King, Jr., as head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

The most frequently quoted sources are the ubiquitous "confidential sources who have furnished reliable information in the past."

This can be anything from wiretaps, to disgruntled ex-em-

ployees, to accommodating newsmen.

Some of the most outrageous charges are based on the most dubious evidence. One entry in Abernathy's file, for example, cites an anonymous "Communist Party functionary" who "described Martin Luther King Jr., as a confirmed Marxist in February, 1962."

Credit Consulted

Also consulted was "Mr. John A. Ritter, Credit Bureau of Greater Atlanta, Inc.," who solemnly informed the FBI that Abernathy "was employed from 1951 to 1961 as pastor of the First Baptist Church . . . Montgomery, Alabama."

For information on former world heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali, nee Cassius Clay, the FBI turned to his former wife:

"On June 7, 1966, Sonji Clay was interviewed at her residence. . . . She advised that from her personal association with Clay, she knows that the NOI (Nation of Islam, the Black Muslims) controls his boxing career and through Main Bout, Inc., of New York City, which is owned and operated by the NOI, limits Clay's income to 20 per cent of his earnings and the remaining 80 per cent is for the NOI.

"She advised that Clay would comply with any directive of the NOI in that he is an absolute blind follower of

Elijah Muhammad (national leader of the Black Muslims)."

In this case the FBI was investigating Ali's claim that he is a conscientious objector. This, however, is hardly sufficient justification for prying from his wife confidential information concerning his finances.

When baby doctor Benjamin Spock was speaking out against nuclear warfare in the mid-1960's, the FBI visited Case Western University in Cleveland, where he was teaching. There they obtained "the personnel file pertaining to Dr. Spock," which was "reviewed on Dec. 23, 1964. . . ."

Such inquiries, of course, serve not only to add bulk to the FBI's files, but also to prejudice a person's employer against him.

Telephone Records

Telephone companies lean over backwards to help the top cops. For information on entertainer Harry Belafonte's associates, for example, the FBI consulted "the records of the New York Telephone Company," which were "furnished to Special Agent James M. Anderson by Edward L. Braune."

The telephone customer, of course, rarely suspects that the phone company is tattling on him to the FBI at the same time it is collecting his money.

Bank accounts also pose no problems for the federal investigators. The file on movie ac-

tress Jane Fonda, for example, is full of details about her checking accounts.

"On Jan. 4, 1971," says a typical excerpt, "a confidential source who has furnished reliable information in the past furnished the following information concerning the checking accounts of Jane Fonda at the Morgan Guaranty Trust Company, 15 Broad Street, New York, N.Y." The "confidential source," apparently, was the bank itself.

The memo went on to list numerous checks Miss Fonda had written to various individuals and groups, including the National Council of Churches (\$3,300), the anti-communist Radio Free Europe (\$105), and the United States Serviceman's Fund (\$950).

"The aforementioned information is not to be made public," a notation warns, "except in a usual proceeding following issuance of a subpoena duces tecum directed to Mr. Arthur W. Herbert, Assistant Secretary, Morgan Guaranty Trust Co."

My associate Joseph Spear spoke to Herbert, who denied having released the information to the FBI. "The bank's policy is not to give information out unless subpoenaed," he said. He could not explain how the FBI got the data except to suggest it might have been released "by our counsel."