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The FBI Is Going to

By Warren Hinckle

A new policy was announced at the FBI field office here last week. From now on, a bureau spokesman said, the FBI is going to tell the truth.

"I promise you I won't lie to you," said Special Agent Joe Aaron. "I don't doubt you've been lied to by the FBI in the past. But I'm not going to lie for anyone. My ass ain't going to jail, you can darn well bet on that."

Mr. Aaron is the local bureau's designated spokesman on matters public. We had a rather unusual telephone conversation last Monday night.

He was on the blower complaining that I had beat on the bureau without good cause. I had written an article about a federal grand jury probe of San Francisco labor union campaign donations. During the probe there was a little problem with the phones at the Building and Construction Trades Council building on Alabama street: when the boys would dial out, they'd get the FBI.

The labor guys surmised that the FBI was tapping their phones, albeit with less than their legendary efficiency. Not so, said Special Agent Aaron, on the telephone. The FBI didn't have any taps at that building, he said. He was particularly hot that I hadn't called the FBI to ask them if they had bolixed up the tap. "You didn't call anybody here and ask for our response," he said.

I told Special Agent Aaron that the last place I'd call to find out the truth about the FBI was the FBI. My experience was that with anything of potential embarrassment to the bureau, the FBI always lied like a rug.

This established the basis for a philosophical discussion between Special Agent Aaron and myself. I recited the alphabet of FBI participation in political chicanery and political violence — all of which the FBI's first instinct was to lie about. Inside the bureau, it's called "damage control."

So L. Patrick Gray once burned the Watergate goodies; and the bureau kept its own counsel about FBI informer Gary Thomas Rowe Jr.'s involvement in both the murders of civil rights marcher Viola Luzzo and the Birmingham church bombing which killed three little black girls. They played dumb, too, about an FBI provocateur in San Diego who set up a right-wing paramilitary group called the Secret Army Organization to bomb and strafe the anti-war movement. And we have locally the still-unresolved claims of Santa Clara county prosecutors that the San Francisco FBI office was covering up what it knew about the dirty tricks of San Jose political burglar Jerry Ducote.

This was not even getting into the bureau's behind-

the-scenes racism — FBI memoes released under Freedom of Information lawsuits reveal the Chicago and San Francisco FBI offices in a dead heat as redneck. Or J. Edgar Hoover's 40-year honeymoon with the mob — Little J. Edgar Caesar maintained throughout his reign that organized crime simply did not exist in America while he hung around the Del Charro Hotel in La Jolla rubbing elbows with mob types and stuffing his face with lime pie ...

There is a new FBI, Special Agent Aaron tells me. The bureau no longer sets its place mats with the

'They took everything they could get their hands on. They even took my typewriter. They haven't given it back yet'

Tupperware of coverup. "If they ever wanted something done that looked shaky, we just wouldn't do it," Aaron said.

"You've written about us before, making us look bad," he said. "Well, trust me, you're going to run out of stories to write about FBI abuses."

Agent Aaron spoke with a soft Southern drawl and was as sincere as a vicarage lawn. I was impressed. It was nice to hear a young FBI fellow really believe that the bureau had abandoned its old tricks.

"Now the next time you hear anything bad about the FBI, you call me up, and I'll set you straight, you hear?"

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Thursday I called up Special Agent Aaron.

"What's this I hear about a ten-man FBI raiding party going into Charles Garry's law office at night and taking the manuscript of an ex-FBI agent's book?"

"Oh, that," said Special Agent Aaron.

The raid occurred December 14 but hadn't been made public. The ex-FBI man is M. Wesley Searingen, who retired in 1977 after 25 years with the bureau. He may become the most important whistle-blower in FBI

Tell the Truth, Sort Of

history. I had called him Thursday and he told me about the FBI grabbing the manuscript of his book.

Swearingen hadn't gone the media route. When he left the FBI he went to attorney Garry with his accounts of widespread bureau corruption and illegalities, ranging from common theft by FBI agents to perjury by the FBI's No. 2 man. He brought documents he said backed up his charges.

Garry contacted U.S. Attorney General Griffin Bell on behalf of his client and the Justice Department last spring began a secret investigation of the FBI, based on Swearingen's documents. Although Swearingen technically could be charged with taking classified documents — from one government office to another — Garry said that Bell had assured his client of immunity.

Swearingen's cooperation with the Justice Department remained unknown to the FBI until December, when the bureau found out about it in an eyeball-snapping happenstance: Swearingen's documents and the Attorney General's correspondence with Garry about the supersecret investigation of top bureau officials was discovered in the rubble of the Jonestown death camp in Guyana.

Garry has an affidavit from Tim Adams, a former Peoples Temple member, swearing that he and former Jim Jones aide Terri Buford Xeroxed Swearingen's file unknown to Garry and took it to Guyana for Jim Jones' bedside reading. "The sonof-a-bitch stole my client's file," is the way Garry puts it.

It is beyond surmise to suggest what the FBI's reaction was when they found documents in Jonestown alleging that FBI wheels in the Los Angeles field office had received \$400 gold wrist watches from the Mafia. The bureau immediately dispatched raiding parties to Swearingen's home in Southern California and Garry's San Francisco office.

"Twelve agents showed up on the boat where I live," Swearingen said. "They took everything they could get their hands on. They even took my typewriter. They haven't given it back yet.

"They threatened to go up to San Francisco and get a truck and take every file in Garry's office," Swearingen said.

Garry told the FBI the agents could have the material in his office since the Justice Department already had everything. Ten FBI men by Swearingen's count — the bureau insists there were only eight — showed up at Garry's office that night to get the goods.

Garry's assistant, Pat Richartz, wanted to wait for Swearingen to arrive from LA before turning over the papers. But she says FBI agent Larry Lawler told her if he didn't get the stuff right then he had 25 more FBI agents waiting at the Federal Building and he'd come over with a posse and a search warrant and take every item in the office, which is known for its left wing cases.

By the time Swearingen showed up the FBI team was pouring over the 212-page manuscript — "part rough draft, part notes to myself" — of a book he is under contract to write for William Morrow. The title of the manuscript was "FBI Chicanery."

The subsequent history of the seized manuscript reads like another chapter in the FBI book of coverup. In New York, a federal judge hearing a \$40 million suit by the Socialist Workers party against the FBI for illegal break-ins ordered the FBI to give him a copy of Swearingen's book, which Swearingen says details some 300 "black bag jobs" he did for the FBI. The FBI

tried to argue that they couldn't turn over the seized book because that would violate Swearingen's common law copyright. But the judge said give, and they finally gave.

The New York judge, Thomas P. Griesa, has frequently knuckle-rapped the FBI for attempting to suppress evidence in the SWP lawsuit. Judge Griesa last year found Attorney General Bell in contempt of court for refusing to turn over the files of 18 FBI informers out of a staggering 1300 informants the FBI paid to spy on the Trots.

Bell's defiance of the court has been based on the sworn testimony of the No. 2 G-Man, James Adams, that the FBI has solemnly pledged never to reveal the identity of its informers. Swearingen told the Justice Department that Adams testimony was perjured and that the FBI in fact always tells informants that they might have to testify in open court.

The FBI may have a motive other than the perhaps lofty one of not wanting to inform on its informants. According to Swearingen, FBI agents commonly "skim" cash payments to informers and in many instances make up reports from fictitious informers and pocket the entire payment.

A U.S. Court of Appeals order is expected this week in Bell's appeal of his contempt order. If the attorney general loses, he will have to turn over the files or go to jail, like John Mitchell.

In Chicago, where a citizens' class action suit against the FBI for illegal surveillance and harassment is pending in federal court, the judge ordered the FBI to give him a copy of everything taken from Garry's San Francisco office. The FBI first claimed it hadn't taken the manuscript from there, and then finally delivered a copy "with 10 percent of the pages blacked out," according to Doug Cassel, a Chicago public interest lawyer.

The blacked out material included lists of Swearin-

gen's Chicago black bag jobs. The reason the FBI gave for censoring the pages was that the information would "embarrass America's foreign relations," Cassel said.

In San Francisco, Special agent Aaron seemed a bit thrown by the details of the latest FBI episode. "I just can not believe that we would not comply with a federal court order in this day and age," he said. He said he couldn't comment on the FBI's reasons for the raid because "it involves Peoples Temple — and that's a pending case."

He turned the phone over to Special Agent Lawler, who confirmed the details of the December raid on Garry's office, but said that he had never been serious about taking every file out of the left wing law firm.

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The FBI hasn't given Swearingen back his manuscript yet, although everybody else seems to have a copy. And the agents still haven't returned his typewriter.

I don't want to be known as a guy who jumps to conclusions about the FBI, but it seems to me the bureau is doing everything it can to keep Swearingen from finishing his book.

If you're not sure, why not call Special Agent Aaron and ask him. He's one guy in the FBI who won't tell a lie. His number is 552-2155.