

Documents Say FBI Now Has 66 SWP Informers

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The FBI has 66 informers posing as members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), a small left-wing political group, newly released FBI files show.

The bureau has spent 38 years investigating the SWP without producing evidence of wrongdoing by the party or its members.

Documents obtained by the SWP through a federal court order in New York and made public yesterday also show that the bureau has used about 1,600 persons, including 316 SWP members, as informers to spy on the party and its youth affiliate, the Young Socialist Alliance, in the last 16 years.

Forty-two of the 316 SWP members who were FBI informers held local offices within the SWP and the YSA, and two others ran for public office as YSA candidates, the papers said.

An FBI spokesman had no comment on the disclosures, which the SWP said give the first specific figures on FBI informers spying on it and the YSA.

The documents, which did not identify any of the informers, consisted of 210 of some 12,000 pages the bureau has turned over to the SWP. The selected files were released by the Political Rights Defense Fund, a New York-based civil liberties organization that is funding the SWP's \$40 million lawsuit against the FBI, the Central Intelligence Agency and other government agencies.

The SWP contends in its suit that the government agencies have illegally harassed it in its pursuit of legitimate politi-

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cal activities. The party also seeks to stop the government's use of informers in the political organizations, saying the practice violates freedom of speech and other First Amendment rights.

Syd Stapleton, the defense fund's national secretary, said in a statement accompanying the newly released documents that "informers are not people who merely furnish information to the FBI, as odious as that in itself is." The 66 current informers, he said, "are skulking around, stealing from, spying on, and spreading malicious gossip about citizens engaged in legal political activities."

Cathy Perkus, a spokeswoman for the SWP, said the 210 pages, which were heavily censored by the FBI, represented the "pertinent files" of 19 past or present SWP members who are or have been FBI informers. She said party lawyers have asked the court to force the FBI to identify the 19 and turn over full details of their activities. The party plans no internal effort to learn the identity of the spies, she said.

The SWP and its youth affiliate together have about 2,500 members. The SWP has 65 chapters and the YSA has 75, most of them on college campuses, Perkus said.

According to the FBI files, the informers fed the FBI thousands of pages of party documents, including correspondence, leaflets, speeches, membership records, financial reports and records of subscribers to the party's newspaper, "The Militant."

The FBI papers show that one person, who did not join the SWP or YSA, ran for Congress at some point during the time he or she acted as an informer. The files did not say whether the campaign was a success.

The FBI files were vague on how the informers obtained SWP and YSA documents. Some say they were "found at SWP headquarters" in New York, and in many cases the files say it was "unknown" how the informers got the papers.

Perkus said party officials believe the documents were stolen, in some cases through burglaries.

She noted that one informer, Timothy Redfearn, is under investigation by the Justice Department for burglarizing and stealing cartons of documents from the SWP office in Denver in early July.

Originally, the SWP sought \$27 million in punitive and compensatory damages in its three-year-old suit. But the party raised the amount to \$37 million and then to \$40 million as it learned more about the extent of the government's spying on its activities.

The Senate intelligence committee suggested in its final report on domestic spying last April that the use of informers to investigate political groups "may chill the exercise of First Amendment rights."