

FBI Labeled King 'Communist' in '62

56-76
By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

The FBI secretly categorized the late Martin Luther King Jr. as a "Communist" months before it ever started investigating him, the staff of the Senate intelligence committee reported yesterday.

Chronicling what it described as the FBI's "vicious vendetta" against King, the 102-page study disclosed that the campaign to discredit him not only continued after his death in 1968 but also included a proposed scheme to harass his widow.

The concerted undercover campaign against the slain civil rights leader was first laid out at a Senate intelligence committee hearing last November, but yesterday's report added stark details.

The Senate investigators, however, shied away from any firm conclusions on the touchy issue of whether the late Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy was aware of the FBI's repeated bugging of King's hotel rooms for information about his "private activities."

The staff report said there is no evidence that Kennedy was ever "expressly informed" of the microphones hidden in King's hotel and motel rooms over a two-year period. However, a Dec. 15, 1966, memo from the files of the FBI's Domestic Intelligence Division pointed out that Kennedy had been furnished in 1964 with a top secret, eight-page summary of

See KING, A24, Col. 1

KING, From AT

the fruits of electronic eavesdropping on King's activities at the Willard Hotel in Washington, the Hilton Hawaiian Village in Honolulu and the Hyatt House Hotel in Los Angeles.

The wording of the top secret report to Kennedy, the 1966 FBI memo stated, was "couched in such a manner that it is obvious that a microphone was the source."

According to the study, the effort to destroy King was "marked by extreme personal vindictiveness," especially on the part of the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. As early as February, 1962, the report showed, Hoover, for reasons that are not entirely clear, jotted down on an FBI memo that crossed his desk the conclusion that "King is no good."

Some three months later, in May, 1962, the FBI included King on a secret list—known as "Section A of the Reserve Index"—of individuals who were to be rounded up and detained in the event of a national emergency.

The bureau did not begin an investigation of alleged Communist influences on King or his Southern Christian Leadership Conference until October, 1962.

The so-called FBI "action memorandum" putting King on the list of potential detainees stated that his name should be "placed in Section A of the Reserve Index and tabbed Communist." According to Senate investigators, the index itself had been known as the "Communist Index" until 1960 when it was renamed and expanded to include "influential" persons deemed likely to "aid subversive elements" in an emergency because of their "subversive associations and ideology."

Others on the list, an earlier Senate committee report showed, included author Norman Mailer as well as "a professor who merely praised the Soviet Union to his class."

The subsequent FBI investigations of King and the Leadership conference soon escalated into a smear cam-

paign that lasted for years, the staff study showed.

In April, 1969, a year after King's assassination in Memphis, the FBI's Atlanta bureau drafted a plan that it forwarded to Washington "in the event the bureau is inclined to entertain counter intelligence action against Coretta Scott King and/or the continuous projection of the public image of Martin Luther King..."

Hoover turned the proposal down in a reply memo stating simply that "the bureau does not desire counterintelligence action

against Coretta King of the nature you suggest at this time."

The FBI director, however, apparently was more receptive to an effort to stop Congress from declaring King's birthday a national holiday.

Alerted that members of the House Internal Security Committee might be contacting the bureau for a briefing on King in light of the proposed holiday, the FBI's Crime Records Division recommended such a session because, a March 18, 1969, memo stated, the members of Congress were in a position to keep the bill bottled up if "they realize King was a scoundrel."

Top-ranking Hoover aide Cartha DeLoach, the Senate report said, advised that such a briefing "is a delicate matter but can be handled very cautiously." Hoover, in must be handled very cautiously."

The report does not indicate whether the briefings were held. Congress has yet to vote on a Martin Luther King birthday bill.

The report on the FBI's campaign against King is one of 13 staff studies to be released this week and next as a windup of the Senate committee's 15-month investigation of the domestic work of Nation's intelligence community.

Chairman Frank Church (D-Idaho) told reporters at a briefing this week that the detailed studies were being published to inform the public of "the extent of the crimes that took place" under the cloak of national security and to encourage Congress to enact reforms.

Renewing his call for an independent special prosecutor to assess all the evidence compiled by the committee in various cases, Church also emphasized his chagrin at the Justice Department's inaction over the past year.

Church acknowledged that prosecution of many incidents might be barred because of the five-year statute of limitations, but he made plain his dissatisfaction with Attorney General Edward Levi's standard comment that the Justice

Department is still
"investigating."

"Months ago, we began turning over material to the Justice Department," Church protested. "I am only aware that up to now no indictments have been issued . . . and no criminal proceedings initiated by any agency against anybody."

The FBI's investigation of King and the SCLC began in October, 1962, as a so-called "Cominfil" inquiry. An acronym for Communist in filtration, the label was used to describe investigations of legitimate non-Communist organizations that the FBI believed to be influenced by Communist Party members. The investigations were to determine the extent of alleged Communist influence.

Senate investigators said the inquiry stemmed from allegations that first appeared in an FBI report to Attorney General Kennedy on Jan. 8, 1962, calling one of King's advisers "a member of the Communist Party." Within a few months, the Senate study added, FBI reports were describing another of King's associates as a "member of the National Committee of the Communist Party."

Although the names of both men have been public knowledge for years, the study referred to the two men—Stanley Levison and Jack O'Dell—only as "Advisor A" and "Advisor B" respectively. O'Dell's name was even deleted from footnotes and passages in the report, which cites past congressional public testimony and newspaper headlines.

The Senate investigators said they were "unable to reach a conclusion concerning the accuracy of the FBI's charges" about the two advisers. The report noted FBI files "do contain information that Adviser A and Adviser B had been members of the Communist Party at some point" before October, 1962, but not afterward.

The report added that the FBI refused to provide the committee with the basis for its charges on the grounds that to do so "would com-

promise informants of continuing use to the bureau."

At the same time, there was no indication in the report that the Senate committee staff secured the testimony of either Levison or O'Dell in an effort to clarify the issue. Levison a semi-retired New York businessman and civic leader publicly stated in an interview with The Washington Post last December that he was the victim of "guilt by association"—compounded by allegations of an ex-business associates who falsely named other persons as "secret Communists" in order to clear himself.

The Senate staff report emphasized that "in any event, the FBI has stated that at no time did it have any evidence that Dr. King himself was a Communist or connected with the Communist Party."

Yet instead of pursuing the alleged Communists themselves, the report noted, "the bureau adopted the curious tactic of trying to discredit the supposed target of Communist Party interest—Dr. King himself."

The investigation turned rapidly into a smear campaign after the 1963 March on Washington which established King at the head of the civil rights movement. At a December, 1963, anti-King strategy meeting at FBI headquarters here, high-ranking officials discussed a long list of proposals, including "placing a good looking female plant in Dr. King's office."

Asked if this were a practice, former FBI Assistant Director William Sullivan, told the committee in hitherto secret testimony that it was "No holds were barred," he said. "This is a rough, tough business."

Some two weeks after the December strategy session, the first of at least 16 bugs was planted in King's room at the Willard Hotel here, yielding 19 reels of tape.

More than 20 reels more were obtained from King's visits the next month to Honolulu and Los Angeles.