

Police Files Detail Activities of Small Young Socialist Unit

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D.C. police intelligence officers amassed elaborate files on the handful of Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) members here in the early 1970s, recording everything from demonstration plans to hair length and complexion of YSA members.

Copies of the files, subpoenaed by the D.C. Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and released to the press yesterday, show YSA to be a minuscule and largely ineffectual organization infiltrated by at least two police informants.

Their reports listed fewer than 40 D.C. area members in late 1973.

One informant's memo, dated Nov. 18, 1972, reported a 10-person YSA meeting at George Washington University. "The YSA was unsuccessful in gaining new members at this meeting," the informant wrote of the youth arm of the SWP.

Another memo, dated April 25, 1973, notes that activists were able to sell only 68 copies of the "Militant," the SWP newspaper, in the Washington area during the previous week.

Still another report marked "confidential" listed 15 persons nominated to serve on the YSA executive board in late 1973.

Several nominees were described in detail. One woman was described as "W/F (white female), 5'6", medium length blonde hair, medium build, wears glasses, has acne."

The 50 pages of police files, released by SWP officers at a press conference yesterday, contain detailed references to YSA meetings, demonstrations, and strategy sessions. Though the files refer frequently to YSA and SWP as "revolutionary Trotskyite" organizations, there are no reports that either group planned or executed any disruptive or illegal acts.

American Civil Liberties Union attorneys representing SWP subpoenaed the police files as part of current litigation against the D.C. board of elections and ethics.

The attorneys contend the party should be exempt from election campaign contribution disclosure requirements because its contributors' names could be used as an "enemies list" by the government and local police agencies.

The police intelligence files, the attorneys claim, show a pattern of "illegal surveillance" which could lead to misuse of the SWP contributors list. The elections board is not expected to rule on the issue for some time.

Attorneys originally asked for both SWP and YSA files maintained by the intelligence division of the police department. Only YSA files were made available, however, because the police said, they had destroyed SWP files, according to ACLU attorney Richard Kohn.

Following a public outcry against the thousands of files maintained during the antiwar movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, police began reviewing and destroying some files in 1974 but stopped in early 1975 when the City Council began hearings on the issue. Destruction of the files has not been resumed, according to Assistant Police Chief Theodore Zanders.