

FBI informer pushes his

By Norman Kempster
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DENVER — Tim Redfearn was just 12 days beyond his 19th birthday when he volunteered to become an FBI informant to help the government cope with violence-prone groups like the far-left Students for a Democratic Society and the far-right Minutemen.

The son of a Methodist minister, Redfearn was a second-generation pacifist who, like his father, held a conscientious objector draft status. He never had been arrested.

That was Aug. 25, 1970. Today, Redfearn, 25, faces charges in two burglaries—a theft of records from the headquarters of the Socialist Workers Party and a theft of furniture from the basement storage locker of an apartment house.

Redfearn's "rap sheet" also shows arrests in November 1970 for malicious mischief, in February 1975 for burglary, and in September 1973 for extortion. He was not prosecuted on the malicious mischief or extortion charges and was released on probation on the burglary charge.

In February 1975, Redfearn's FBI contact agent reported that the informer had admitted committing "a series of burglaries because he was

in desperate need for money."

The bureau was offended by that and cut Redfearn off the payroll for seven months. The burglaries that Redfearn admitted had no connection with his FBI informant role.

But Redfearn served his apprenticeship as a thief more than a year earlier when he stole political records, personal bank statements and other documents from the headquarters of the Socialist Workers Party and from a house where three members of the party's youth affiliate lived. There were at least four separate thefts.

The fruits of these burglaries, at least two of which involved break-ins, were placed in the files of the Denver FBI field office. The police were not notified, and Redfearn was not arrested.

The story of Redfearn, Informant number DN 481-6 to the FBI, is told in an 18-inch stack of paper from the once-secret files of the Denver FBI office. The entire file was turned over to attorneys for the Socialist Workers Party in compliance with a court order as part of the party's \$37 million civil suit against the government.

The papers, the most complete rec-

ords ever released by the FBI on the way it gets information, provide a rare glimpse into the shadowy world of the paid informer. In that world, Redfearn was a star.

Redfearn's first contact with the FBI was in 1970 when an agent asked him to identify photographs of suspects in a political violence case.

He received no pay for his effort, and apparently he fingered the wrong man. But he developed a taste for aiding the bureau that dominated the next six years of his life.

The first item in Redfearn's file is a letter he wrote to special agent James O'Connor on Aug. 25, 1970:

"I should have written sooner, but I've been in the hospital with an abscessed tonsil," the letter began. "I wanted to ask you what one like myself would have to do to work for the FBI. I wanted to be of help on that bus thing because such a thing made me mad. I guess (name deleted) wasn't the one, although he may have known something and just shot off his mouth . . ."

"I seem to get around quite a bit, protests, marches and such, and I know quite a bit about these people and what goes on. My appearance is such that I pass for just another per-

skills too far, faces charges

son in the crowd. Let me say that I am not interested in busting people for the use of drugs. I am against the SDS and Minutemen and other groups that hide out in small mountain towns such as Idledale. I'm sure you know, too, that I could pull practically anything off because of my appearance."

Redfearn did fit the stereotype of a radical — shoulder-length brown hair, blue eyes, tall (6-2) and thin (160 pounds). While he seemed to think his appearance was an advantage, it gave the bureau pause.

A message from Denver to FBI headquarters in Washington dated Dec. 21, 1970, said: "While subject is a hippie type, no indication has been noted that he lives promiscuously or is a thief."

A little more than a month later, the Denver headquarters told then FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover: "Denver feels that Redfearn can be used without danger of embarrassment to the bureau and that he is stable and reliable."

There is irony in those early exchanges. Under the influence of the bureau, Redfearn shortened his hair style, became a thief, sought psychi-

atric treatment and ultimately became an embarrassment to the bureau at a time that it was hoping to minimize the public impact of a Justice Department investigation of "black bag jobs" — burglaries by the FBI to obtain information.

Redfearn, who wanted to help the FBI prevent violence, was assigned to infiltrate the Socialist Workers Party and its youth group, the Young Socialist Alliance, Marxist organizations that advocate revolutionary change by peaceful methods. He joined the alliance and was accepted as a member of the party on July 5, two days before the burglary that exposed him as an informant.

Although Redfearn's reports seldom contained any hint that a crime had been committed, the FBI clearly approved of what it was getting. The file contains dozens of messages from Denver to Washington seeking authority to raise Redfearn's pay. Ultimately, he was authorized to receive up to \$400 a month although, like all informers, he was paid strictly on a piece-work basis—cash for specific information.

The file shows no indication that the FBI ever had misgivings about the sources of Redfearn's informa-

tion.

On June 20, 1973, Redfearn filed this report: "Enclosed are items stolen from the YSA local office . . . all 3-by-5 cards will be returned to proper places so that no suspicion will be aroused."

This was the only time Redfearn used the word "stolen."

It was against this background that Redfearn arrived at Denver field office July 8 with four cartons of Socialist files in the trunk of his car. He told agent John V. Almon that he needed money and he assumed he would be in for a raise.

In a sworn statement later, Almon said that he did not know at the time that the Socialist headquarters had been broken into.

The FBI did not inform Denver police of Redfearn's involvement in the burglary until a week later. By that time, Redfearn had been arrested in the apartment house burglary.

On July 22, agent O'Connor, who had recruited Redfearn six years earlier, wrote him a letter informing him that his relationship with the bureau had been terminated.