

IN HER OWN WORDS

THE QUAKERS WARN THAT POLICE SPYING ON POLITICAL ACTIVISTS DID NOT END WITH VIETNAM



People weekly

June 11, 1979

In 1975 the American Friends Service Committee, the activist arm of the Quakers, set up a Program on Government Surveillance and Citizen's Rights. Using the Freedom of Information Act, it obtained some 13,000 pages of documents that revealed the FBI had been keeping extensive records on the AFSC for more than five decades. In response, the committee hired onetime antiwar activist Linda Valentino, a Los Angeles-born non-Quaker, to investigate local surveillance. Valentino, 26, zeroed in on the Law Enforcement Intelligence Unit (LEIU)—a little-known private organization of state, county and city law enforcement agencies which collects data on political activists across the country.

"People think that's all a thing of the past," says Valentino, a distant cousin of silent-movie star Rudolph Valentino. "They would be shocked to learn that today they could wind up in a police subversive file for the flimsiest of reasons—or no reason at all." A Moorpark College political science major and a McGovern delegate to the 1972 Democratic Convention, Valentino talked about "the new breed of domestic police spy" with Christopher P. Andersen of PEOPLE.

Photographs by Tony Korody/Sygm



MARK SHIMALE OSEI

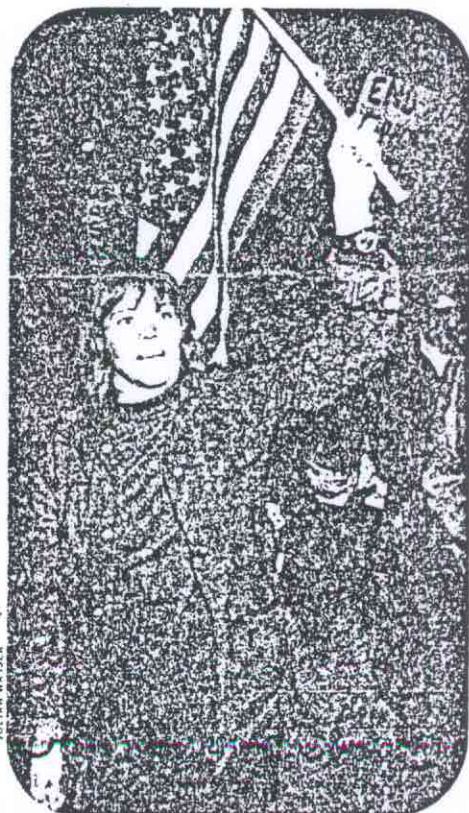
This demonstrator calling for indictments of two L.A. policemen in 1977 was later unmasked as a cop named Georgia Odom.

How much domestic police spying involves political activities?

A great amount. Now that the FBI and the CIA have started to lay off in the wake of the Watergate and CIA rev-

CONTINUED

In places like the law library of the Los Angeles ACLU, Linda Valentino worked two years documenting police intelligence abuses.



JULIAN WASSER

Five years after this 1973 demonstration, Jane Fonda learned that one of her own bodyguards was a policeman working undercover.



In her cluttered L.A. office, Valentino consults with alleged police spy victims (from left) Burt Wilson, Anne Davis and Jeff Cohen.

elations, local police departments have quietly picked up the slack. Major targets now are political activists in general and antinuclear protesters in particular. Everyone knows Jane Fonda was spied on by the FBI, but she was also watched for years by the Los Angeles police department.

How did the L.A. police go about that?

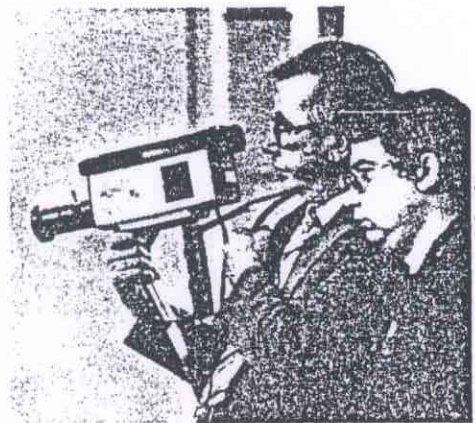
Jon Dial, to all appearances a left-wing leader who provided security for Jane Fonda at political rallies, turned out to be an undercover cop. In 1977 Dial married his roommate, another "activist" named Connie Milazzo, who had been arrested at a Progressive Labor party demonstration. Milazzo wound up admitting in court that she too was an undercover police officer.

Why shouldn't the police keep an eye on potentially dangerous groups?

Surveillance is only justified when there is probable cause to believe that someone is involved in criminal or violent activity. I'm all for anything that helps the police keep an eye on organized crime. I think that also applies to groups like the Ku Klux Klan, the Symbionese Liberation Army, the Weathermen and the American Nazi party. But local police have now gone far beyond that.

How far have they gone?

In 1978 we obtained the Los Angeles Police Department's 1975 list of nearly 200 organizations described as subversive. Among them were the National Council of Churches, Unitarian Church, National Organization for Women (NOW), Gay Liberation Front, even the state-funded Educational Opportunity Program.



Police cameramen (above), sent to film anti-nuclear speakers last year, were thrown out of a Los Angeles City Council meeting.

RICK MAYER/LOS ANGELES TIMES/PHOTO

How did the police spy on these groups?

By infiltrating them, surreptitiously photographing their members at meetings and rallies, even bugging and wiretapping. Of course the police strongly deny all of this. When it was founded, LEIU said its purpose was to deal with organized crime. But the agenda for one of its annual conferences lists a meeting "to cover names of local militant organizations, top leaders, identifying traveling members, financial support and sources of other support and influence." They weren't talking about organized crime at that meeting.

Where else is this going on?

Seattle, Detroit, Chicago, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Miami. Most major cities in the U.S. have surveillance and intelligence sections, often known as "Red Squads," that do the dirty work.



At Valentino's urging, councilman Zev Yaroslavsky (above) has proposed a Freedom of Information Act for the city of Los Angeles.

Where does all the information wind up?

Some 230 law enforcement agencies across the country belong to LEIU, which is based in Sacramento. It does no spying of its own, but collects data filed by the various Red Squads, which have the exclusive use of a computer run and paid for by the California Justice Department. Each member organization pays a fee of \$50 and a \$300-a-year computer fee. LEIU also has a card file on more than 4,200 people, which costs members another \$300 to obtain.

How does the system work?

If a police intelligence officer wants to find something about John Doe of New York City, he merely dials a WATS line and gives his identification number. The computer is scanned and the information on John Doe is mailed or phoned to him.

What information is in the LEIU computer and on these cards?

The subject's name, aliases, physical description, current and past addresses, record of past arrests—but not convictions—modus operandi, which includes any political activities, names of associates, fingerprints and, if available, a recent photo.

How do you know?

In three suits brought against the Chicago police's "Red Squad" by the American Civil Liberties Union and two other legal groups, attorney Richard Gutman was allowed to examine a sample of some 400 cards. He claims that about 10 percent of the names could be classified as clearly political—feminists, black activists, gay rights workers, even people interested in tax reform.

What other evidence do you have on police spying?

In Seattle a public disclosure suit on behalf of 42 individuals and organizations succeeded in opening up local intelligence files. One individual had a file started on him simply because political posters were seen in the back seat of his car. The American Civil Liberties Union has filed suit against both LEIU and the Flint, Mich. police department, based on sworn testimony from the city ombudsman, a former police officer, who said that he saw LEIU records on Flint political activists at headquarters.

How does a person wind up in a police intelligence file?

No actual proof of a person's involvement in crime is needed—no arrest record, no indictments or convictions. Nathan Holden, a former California state senator, was listed as an "associate" of Black Panther Michael Zinzun merely because Holden was once his landlord.

What if information is requested and there is no file on that person?

Then that person's name is inserted into the "no-hit" file. Eventually the no-hit file can be converted into an active file as bits of information are collected. The sinister thing is that an active file is started on the basis of nothing more than somebody asking for information.

How do you know if you have been entered in the computer?

You don't, since the Freedom of Information Act applies only to federal government agencies—which the LEIU insists it isn't. You have to sue to get information like that.

How effective has this system been in combating organized crime?

According to the office of the California state legislative analyst, LEIU has not been responsible to date for the arrest or conviction of even one major organized crime figure in that state.

Who is footing the bill for this?

Ultimately, the taxpayer. The federal government pumped in nearly \$2 million to LEIU from 1971 to 1978. Now the California Department of Justice finances it. The assistant director of the branch of the state Justice Department that serves as LEIU's administrative arm is Charles Casey, who happens to be Gov. Jerry Brown's brother-in-law.

Does the federal government watch over LEIU in any way?

There is no oversight and no accountability, ostensibly because this system is private. LEIU grew out of a personal feud between FBI director J. Edgar Hoover and the powerful L.A. police chief William Parker. When the FBI refused to let local police in on its investigations, Parker's intelligence captain in 1956 set up LEIU—in effect, his own unofficial FBI. Through the Freedom of Information Act, we got hold of 1,000 FBI documents on the LEIU. They prove that FBI agents kept a close watch on the competition.

Are local police intelligence units handing over files to private corporations?

Absolutely. In Michigan, for example, a consumer group brought suit against the governor and state police and discovered that the police had files on over 50,000 citizens—some of which were funneled by Detroit intelligence to the Chrysler Corporation.

Are investigations going on right now?

The Michigan legislature is considering a bill to outlaw the state's membership in LEIU. A similar bill may be introduced in California this year. Nearly 50 suits challenging police surveillance are pending in cities as far-flung as New Orleans and Buffalo.

What should be done about this domestic intelligence network?

Perhaps LEIU could be a useful law enforcement tool—if it were made accountable, and if all political information were purged from its computers. But that is not likely to happen without a fight. In the meantime anyone who is concerned about women's or gay rights, nuclear power or rising taxes must first consider a sobering fact: that he or she could wind up in some police file labeled "subversive." □



When not crusading against police spying, Valentino enjoys cooking at home for friends—in this case Chinese vegetables in a wok.