

FBI was never sure about

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Tracked him for 30 years, files show

WASHINGTON (AP) - For 30 years, from the Depression through the McCarthy era, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and most of the Cold War, the FBI kept tabs on I.F. Stone, the gadfly journalist. But not without difficulty. Even getting his name right was a struggle.

The facts were fairly straightforward: He was Isidor Feinstein at birth in 1907 and had his name legally changed in 1938 to Isidor Feinstein Stone. He wrote under the name I.F. Stone. He was called Izzy.

But in the FBI's records he was "Isadore Finklestein Stone." He was "Isidor Feinsteine." He was "Isadore Finglestein Stone." He was "Irving F. Stone." He was "I.M. Stone."

The FBI's file on Stone, a 4¼-inch, 1,794-page document, was recently released under the Freedom of Information Act. Much information is blacked out and 332 pages were withheld.

The file reveals as much about bureau operations in those days as about Stone. And it shows how tedious and confusing it was to document the thoughts of a maverick who for six decades offered opinions on everything political.

America's best-known leftist journalist was hard to pigeonhole. He called himself a socialist. Was he a card-carrying Communist? Then why was he always stepping on the party line?

"What have we on him?," asked Director J. Edgar Hoover on July 29, 1941. And: "What is his name?"

Stone left no doubt what he thought of Hoover. "The great sacred cow," he said in a speech, "the big Dick Tracy of our society, the immortalized secret police chief, the center of one of the biggest publicity build-ups in American history."

Stone wrote thousands of articles in liberal papers, including PM, the New York Post and the Compass, and, from 1953 to 1971, in his own newsletter, I.F. Stone's Weekly and I.F. Stone's Bi-Weekly.

He traveled the country making speeches to leftist audiences. He signed petitions and ads and lent his name to letterheads. He denounced the House Committee on Un-American Activities and the Smith Act, requiring the registration of foreigners, and the McCarran Act, requiring Communists to register as foreign agents.

On a passport application he refused, "as a matter of principle," to say whether he was then or ever had been a Communist. Late in life, he described himself as a "New Lefty before there was a New Left." He died in 1989 at age 81.

According to a June 10, 1955, memo to Hoover, a single informant, his identity blacked out, tagged Stone as a member of the Communist Party. He said Stone belonged to the party from the mid-1930s until as late as

1945.

Another informant said Stone "was certainly not a CP member" and had nothing in common with the party's "slavish attitude" toward Moscow.

On April 4, 1949, the files noted, Stone told 2,500 people at a "Campaign

for Peace" rally in New York that he was "one of those damn Reds and had his red woolen underwear on." Two years later, the file said that Stone "has openly admitted being a 'Red.'"

In 1953, William C. Bullitt, the former U.S. ambassador to France, said Stone "served the interests of the Soviets more completely than anyone he had known" and deserved close scrutiny.

Stone must have known he was being watched. Sometimes he began his speeches: "Fellow Communists and FBI agents."

Keeping track of Stone must have been humdrum. FBI records described him as a "notoriously sloppy dresser, hair never combed."

Checking his outgoing mail, agents found he had written a letter to the Sonotone Corp. in Elmford, N.Y., maker of hearing aids. "It will be noted that Stone uses a hearing aid," the FBI file said.

On Dec. 11, 1953, the files recorded, Stone arrived in Chicago via

I.F. Stone

American Airlines' Flight 255. He carried a brown briefcase. He took the bus to the Loop. He tried to get a room at the Palmer House, but it was full. He "proceeded to the Hamilton Hotel ... where he registered at 3:50 p.m." He was assigned to Room 603. He made 22 local phone calls and one long-distance call.

The next day he spoke at a banquet of the National Conference to Repeal the Walter-McCarran Law and Defend Its Victims.

His less-than-revolutionary message, according to an FBI informant: "Stone thought the United States was a wonderful country in which to live and that it provided more opportunities for the foreign born than their ancestors had ever experienced, in spite of certain laws such as the Smith Act and the Walter-McCarran Law."

If the bureau couldn't decide what to make of Stone, neither could the Communists. They portrayed executed atomic spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg as innocent martyrs. Stone thought they were guilty, but not deserving of the death penalty.

The Communists said South Korea had started the Korean War. "I am sorry to say that the South Koreans had to defend themselves from aggression," Stone told a rally, the files noted. His speech was not well received.

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knew Stone best during the period 1941-44 when Stone was Washington Editor of "The Nation" which [redacted] saw Stone occasionally when the latter was associated with the newspaper, "PM".

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(85)

b1 (S) [redacted] (65-60414) [redacted]

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65-60414-34 p. 5
(10)

Application filed by [redacted] (protect identity) dated 8/9/44 listed I.F. Stone as a [redacted] reference.

b7C [redacted]

On 9/29/53 William Christian Bullitt, a former US Ambassador to France, advised that he recalled several articles written by him in 1944 for "Life" magazine, all of which were critical of the USSR. He specifically mentioned the article entitled "The World From Rome," which appeared in the 9/4/44 issue of "Life." Bullitt stated he was "bitterly criticized by all of the left wing press and many writers. Among those recalled [redacted] and the whole 'Herald Tribunes' crowd."

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Associated Press

This is one page of a file the FBI kept on journalist I.F. Stone. The FBI's 30-year file on Stone was recently released under the Freedom of Information Act. Much information among the 1,794 pages was blacked out.