

Kirk's 'Gangbusters' Go Into Action in Florida

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CORAL GABLES, Fla. — A miniature bust of J. Edgar Hoover sits in the executive suite. Downstairs, shoulder-high American flags guard the entrance to corporate headquarters.

This is the Wackenhut Corp., a richly lined private detective and "industrial security" agency where the Puritan ethic seems firmly in command. In its search for profits, Wackenhut will eagerly serve as a keeper of public as well as private morals.

Wackenhut men arrest speeders in the Florida municipality of Sea Ranch Lakes, stop trespassers at the Kennedy Space Center, man the gates at the Atomic Energy Commission's nuclear testing ground in Nevada, help spot security risks for Defense Department contractors and, incidentally, to this and other corporate activities, maintain files on nearly 3 million Americans.

Wackenhut's biggest customer is the AEC which pays \$3 million a year.

Its most controversial is Claude F. Kirk Jr., the new Republican Governor of Florida. Kirk has drafted Wackenhut's men as privately paid police investigators, his personal "gangbusters" for a war on big-time crime to be sustained by voluntary contributions.

It is an extraordinary arrangement for an extraordinary campaign, aimed, in Kirk's words, at driving "the criminal element not only from Florida, but beyond national boundaries." Serving it will be what Wackenhut claims is the largest force of former FBI agents of any company in the Nation. The targets include prostitu-



GEORGE R. WACKENHUT

tion, numbers rackets, burglary rings, abortion networks and any related corruption of public office. In a state where most officeholders are still Democratic, some suspect this means as many Florida Democrats as can be caught, in po-
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litical campaigns if not the courts.

Wackenhut denies it. The war on crime, declares founder-president George Russell Wackenhut, will pick on no party. It will, he says, simply seek out "corrupt officials" for official prosecution only. At Kirk's request, Wackenhut is making pre-hiring checks of the Governor's appointees.

Kirk has discussed his crusade with onetime crimebuster Thomas E. Dewey and with California's Republican Gov. Ronald Reagan.

The situation has Florida Democrats concerned, civil libertarians alarmed, and the general public simply curious to see what the hunt produces. In the words of Dade County Mayor Chuck Hall, usually a reliable reflector of public opinion: "I'm for investiga-

tions—period."

Tips Followed Up

Despite publicly voiced complaints that the plan smacks of "Gestapo tactics" and may be illegal, Wackenhut is not waiting.

"The Governor has given me, in effect, carte blanche for what needs to be done," says Wackenhut, a former FBI man and a weight-lifting 200 pounds of muscle. Tips, many of them anonymous, are being followed up. Subpoenas, he declared in an interview, are being issued "right now, this minute."

The day after Kirk announced his plans in his Jan. 3 inaugural address in Tallahassee, a Wackenhut agent walked into the Miami Police Department's intelligence division and made it clear that Wackenhut would expect easy access to the unit's "confidential files."

These include not only arrest records supplied by the FBI, but opinions, conclusions and hearsay about thousands of individuals not yet on the Wackenhut Corp. lists.

"I don't want to accuse him (Wackenhut) of anything," says Miami's bluff Police Chief Walter Headley, "but if they have access to our files, they'll probably copy them and transfer them to their office. How do I know they won't wind up being used in some divorce case?"

He Has Answer

From Wackenhut, the replies to this and other potential conflicts of interest that could arise with an investigator who has private as well as public clients boil down to one essential rejoinder: trust Wackenhut. The company, he says, is built on "standards of dignity, quality and integrity." The files, he declares, will be kept separate. The laws, he insists, will protect the innocent.

"Even if J. Edgar Hoover were a no-goodnik and was of a mind to misuse his powers," Wackenhut asserts, "he couldn't do it. It couldn't happen. This is a government of laws, not men."

Wackenhut says he wants neither the power of arrest nor the power of subpoena for himself or his men. But as the Governor's investigators, he stressed, "we expect the full cooperation of every police agency in the State."

From there the Wackenhut

investigations will cross state and even national boundaries if need be. The Wackenhut Corp. has some 5000 employes with 28 offices stretching from Puerto Rico to Hawaii, and subsidiaries in several Latin American countries.

The company has had amazing growth since it was started 13 years ago, but it is still only No. 3—behind Pinkerton and Burns—and this makes Wackenhut try harder, much harder.

Goal Is No. 1 Spot

"Our goal," he has said, "is eventually to become the No. 1 professional investigative organization in the country."

It was perhaps natural that Kirk called on George Wackenhut for the assignment, although on the surface it might seem an improbable alliance.

Kirk, called "Kissing Claude" by some of his constituents, has something of a playboy image. His wife recently divorced him a second time, charging him with excessive drinking and "indiscreet public associations with other women." Kirk did not contest the action.

The 47-year-old Wackenhut leads an exemplary life. He eschews smoking, lifts weights, runs a mile every other night and looks like the wrestling coach and professional soccer player he once was. He is also a registered Democrat.

But both men are staunch conservatives, followers of Barry M. Goldwater. They met in 1964 when Kirk was futilely attempting to win a U.S. Senate seat by calling conservative Spessard Holland (D-Fla.) an ultraliberal. Wackenhut was serving on the Dade County Goldwater committee. He says he contributed only \$500 to Kirk's gubernatorial campaign.

As president of the Wackenhut Corp., Wackenhut earns \$57,200 a year overseeing such chores as plant protection and business "counter-espionage." He personally receives only \$1 as director of Kirk's war

on crime, but he fully expects the campaign to enhance the company's reputation and increase its business volume.

It is already a \$23-million-a-year operation with little resemblance to the four-man Special Agent Investigation, Inc., that Wackenhut started in 1954. Its volume the first full year was only \$89,700.

Wackenhut got into it almost by chance. An instructor at a Haverford School in Pennsylvania and later the Johns Hopkins University, Wackenhut was heading for a teaching and coaching career when the Korean War prompted the FBI to drop its requirements for a background in law or accounting. He served in the Bureau from 1951 to 1954.

His work since then has won an international clientele, and some critics.

In 1955, he and three other men were cited for contempt of the Circuit Court in Dade County (Miami), spent a night in jail and were ultimately fined \$100 each for intimidating a witness who had been waiting outside a courtroom to testify in a civil lawsuit.

The four said they were trying to keep the witness from changing a statement he had allegedly made to Wackenhut. The effort involved a trip to the State Attorney's offices, where one of the four was an investigator.

Citation Upheld

Wackenhut acknowledged at the time that he had falsely told the witness that he had worn a concealed dictaphone during the interview in dispute. The witness said he was

"threatened with jail for perjury." The contempt citation was upheld by the Florida Supreme Court.

"In attempting to prevent a man from committing a felony it seems to me that a man trying to do right would try to convince him any way he knew how," Wackenhut says now.

Records in the case at the Dade Courthouse have been obliterated under a 1964 order by the same judge, now dead, who cited the four for contempt. "All four of us," Wackenhut says, asked the judge to do it.

A copy of the expungement order was subsequently delivered to me at my hotel by a Wackenhut man. In it, the judge, Pat Cannon, called the four "reputable and outstanding citizens of the community" who "should not be taunted by a matter which concerns no one but the undersigned judge and the parties themselves."

In 1957, Wackenhut's work apparently displeased members of a Dade County grand jury, which had hired his firm as its investigator, and Wackenhut's attorney as its special counsel.

Foreman Voices Fears

Wackenhut said he would let the grand jury work speak for itself. His Special Agent Investigators, Inc., was hired in connection with a report on Miami Beach vice initially commissioned by the Miami Beach City Council. Wackenhut publicly described it as "so hot it's dynamite."

The grand jury handed

town no indictments as a result of the report. It dismissed Wackenhut and the special counsel several days before the jury term ended.

Says John Adams Baker, the grand jury foreman: "My experience during the summer of 1957 with Mr. Wackenhut and his attorney and my personal investigation of some of their methods would make me very fearful of his getting into any position of power.

"I would frankly fear, in spite of his recent comments in the press to the contrary, that he might try to develop Gestapo methods."

Baker says Wackenhut "brought such pressure" on the jurors "that we wound up hiring special legal counsel recommended by him, namely his own attorney." Wackenhut, Baker related, claimed that using the State Attorney's office, the customary procedure, would foul up the probe. But as the weeks wore on, Baker says, he began to worry more and more over the prospect of the grand jury's "spending money and getting nothing."

'Poppycock,' He Says

"The next few months were a nightmare to me," Baker said. "Wackenhut would more than once call me up at 2 or 3 in the morning and whisper over the phone: 'Jack, this is George . . . I'm working on something real hot . . . If you don't see me in the morning, well . . . I can't talk too much now.'

"He was just trying to keep me impressed with his dangerous work in running down the underworld. In retrospect,

I feel that was a lot of poppycock."

Subsequent grand juries, however, have apparently not been similarly disillusioned. The Wackenhut Corp. was hired as special investigator for the last Dade grand jury and the current one as well.

Wackenhut is a stalwart of the Society of Former Agents of the FBI and members occasionally send him business. The House Administration Subcommittee hired the Wackenhut Corp. for its probe of Rep. Adam Clayton Powell (D.N.Y.) on the recommendation of attorney Daniel L. O'Connor, the Subcommittee's special counsel and a former FBI agent. He said he uses the Wackenhut Corp. regularly in his private law practice and recommended the firm when the Justice Department declined to provide the service of the FBI.

There were reports that Wackenhut agents had been overly aggressive in questioning members of Powell's staff, but Subcommittee Chairman Wayne Hays (D-Ohio) has said the only complaint to come to his attention involved a woman who apparently didn't

Conservative Roots

For the last five years, Wackenhut has also been seeking to pinpoint the Communist threat in a monthly bulletin called the Wackenhut Security Review, distributed widely through Wackenhut agents and clients. He calls it a "good public relations piece."

Wackenhut says he belongs to no right-wing organizations, but the corporation has deep conservative roots. Its board of directors includes:

- Ralph E. Davis, an early member of the National Council of the John Birch Society, who is Wackenhut's western regional director. (Wackenhut says Davis's corporate status was "part of the deal" when the Wackenhut Corp. bought Davis's General Plant Protection Co. in 1962.)

- Lloyd Wright, past president of the American Bar Association and 1962 GOP primary opponent of Sen. Thomas H. Kuchel (R-Calif.). During the campaign, Wright said he was no Bircher himself, but wished "we had 10,000 or 10 million more members like those I know in the John Birch Society." Wright and Gen. Mark Clark (USA, Ret.), another Wackenhut director, also serve as members of the national strategy committee of the American Security Council, an organization that conducts educational programs about "Communist-statist conspiracies" and serves member companies by checking out job holders and applicants for subversion and other failings.

- Edward V. Rickenbacker, retired board chairman of Eastern Airlines, who has frequently stumped for repeal of the income tax and United States withdrawal from the United Nations.

Wackenhut says his current anticrime campaign for Florida and the Nation will not concern itself with subversives, however. Any evidence accidentally uncovered on that score, he said, will be turned over to the FBI.

"I'm trained to think along lines of what's lawful and right," he said.