

Bureau Accused of Trying to Manipulate News Media

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The Federal Bureau of Investigation repeatedly and covertly attempted to manipulate the news media in an effort to influence public opinion and discredit citizens and organizations that were its "targets," the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Activities reported today.

The committee's report on domestic intelligence activities presented evidence of pervasive and frequently successful efforts by the F.B.I. to use the news media to attack such targets as the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and groups and individuals in what is described as the "new left."

Following are examples from the report of ways in which the F.B.I. sought to influence reports of the news media:

¶Through a "good friend" who was chairman of the board of a national magazine, the bureau killed an unfavorable article about the bureau that was scheduled to appear in the magazine.

¶F.B.I. officials approached reporters, including one from a major magazine, and offered to play tape recordings "embarassing" to Dr. King.

¶A freelance writer was furnished by the bureau with photographs depicting a radical

group's apartment as "a shambles with lewd, obscene and revolutionary slogans displayed on the walls."

¶The Washington bureau chief of a major news organization was allegedly given discrediting information about the lawyer defending Dr. Daniel Ellsberg in the Pentagon papers case.

The F.B.I.'s efforts to use the news media were generally part of the bureau's "counterintelligence program, designed to "disrupt" or "neutralize" people or groups considered a threat to domestic security. But the report indicates that the F.B.I. also sought to use the news media to disseminate its own views on such issues as foreign policy and sexual morality.

The report said that the bureau's crime records division maintained "covert liaison" with the news media to advance two main domestic intelligence objectives: "(1) providing derogatory information to the media intended to generally discredit the activities or ideas of targeted groups or individuals, and (2) disseminating unfavorable articles, news releases and background information in order to disrupt particular activities."

At the committee's hearings, a former director of the crime records division, Thomas E. Bishop, testified that he kept a list of the bureau's "press

friends" in his desk. He also said that the F.B.I. sometimes refused to cooperate with reporters who were critical of the bureau or its director.

'Public Record' Data

Mr. Bishop said that, as a general rule, the bureau gave out only "public record information," but that this could cover almost everything in the files "on a targeted individual."

Dr. King, the civil rights leader who was assassinated in 1968, was a frequent object of F.B.I. "news leaks," according to the report.

The report stated that in November 1964, the Washington bureau chief of a "national news publication" told Nicholas B. Katzenbach, who was then Attorney General, that one of his reporters had been approached by the F.B.I. and offered a chance to listen to "interesting" tape recordings involving Dr. King.

Benjamin C. Bradlee, now executive editor of The Washington Post, confirmed to a question today that when he was bureau chief of Newsweek magazine in 1964 he informed Mr. Katzenbach of the offer made to one of his reporters.

The report indicated that the F.B.I. offered to disclose the contents of illegal wiretaps to the news media on a number of occasions. On one occasion, it learned through a wiretap that a magazine was about to print an article critical of President Nixon's Vietnam policy and passed that information on to the White House. The article was written by former Secretary of Defense Clark M. Clifford.

The committee also found that F.B.I. surveillance of newspapers frequently produced political information rather than national security information. For example, the report said that one wiretap showed that one of the F.B.I. "targets" helped Sargent Shriver to write a news release criticizing a speech by President Nixon.

The report generally did not divulge the names of the journalists or new media executives who were in contact with the F.B.I.

According to the Senate findings, the F.B.I. maintained a close relationship with the chairman of a national magazine described in a bureau memorandum as "our good friend." The report said that the bureau took advantage of the relationship with the unidentified executive "squelch" an unfavorable article, to postpone publication of an article on an F.B.I. case and to forestall publication of an article written by Dr. King.

Following are some other examples cited in the report of attempted manipulation of the news media by the F.B.I.:

¶F.B.I. headquarters asked its field offices to provide the press with specific data "depicting the scurrilous and depraved nature of many of the

characters, activities, habits and living conditions representative of new left adherents," saying that "every avenue of possible embarrassment must be vigorously and enthusiastically explored."

¶The bureau ordered field offices to gather information that would disprove allegations by "the liberal press, the bleeding hearts and the forces on the left," that the Chicago police used undue force against demonstrators at the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

¶Several months after the Cointelpro operations were supposed to have ended, the F.B.I. attempted to discredit Leonard Boudin, the lawyer defending Dr. Daniel Ellsberg in the Pentagon papers case, by disclosing to the Washington bureau chief of a major news service information about Mr. Boudin's alleged sympathy for "Communist causes."

¶The bureau placed in a newspaper an article by "a wealthy Negro industrialist" that purported "to give the Negro is downtrodden and has no opportunities in America." The bureau also aided the publication of articles supporting the war in Vietnam.

As one of its recommendations, the committee urged that intelligence agencies be prohibited from disseminating information to the news media for political or other improper purposes, including discrediting opponents or critics.