

FBI Handed Out Data On Teacher's Politics

By Lawrence Meyer
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The FBI channeled information about an Austin, Tex., teacher's activities in the Socialist Workers Party to the local school board in an apparently successful effort to have her discharged, according to documents made public yesterday.

The documents, released by the FBI in response to a suit brought against it by the Socialist Workers Party, provided no derogatory information about the teacher, Evelyn Rose Sell, but refer only to her association with the party, a Trotskyite group formed 46 years ago.

After the Austin school board failed to renew her contract in 1970, FBI agents visited her new employer, the Human Opportunities Commission in an attempt to have her discharged from her commission job, she charged yesterday.

"They repeatedly visited the directors of the agency," she said in a telephone interview from Los Angeles, where she now lives. "The first time, they asked, 'Did you know she was a candidate (for public office) of the Socialist Workers Party?' And the next time, they asked, 'Is she still working there?'"

An FBI spokesman said the bureau could not comment because of the pending litigation.

Mrs. Sell, who ran for the state board of education in Michigan in 1968 and for the U.S. Senate in 1958, said that a

director of the private, non-profit anti-poverty corporation in Austin was "quite outraged" by the FBI's repeated visits.

"The only reason they didn't succeed at getting me fired from the subsequent job was that people were outraged at their tactics. But they tried hard—repeatedly," she said. "I was a legal candidate for office, which they used against me, which on the face of it is a fantastic kind of a charge—that I ran for public office."

The activities against Mrs. Sell, 45, were part of the FBI's counterintelligence program (called Cointelpro) against the Trotskyite party.

FBI's activities against the party, begun in 1961, included attempts to harass and disrupt it. FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley said last November that all Cointelpro activities, which were directed at both left- and right-wing groups, stopped in 1971. But SWP officials have asserted that the program continues with FBI agents still harassing the party and its members.

Mrs. Sell was hired by the Austin school board in 1969 to serve as a teacher in the city's federally funded Head Start program for preschool children. The FBI documents note that "the subject [Mrs. Sell] was described as an intelligent, excellent teacher who was well qualified in her field."

A memo from the agent in the charge of the FBI's San Antonio field office to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover on Oct.

8, 1969, stated that the Austin school district "desires to terminate her services but is unable to do so because of a lack of information from the Detroit public school system [where Mrs. Sell had previously taught] concerning her background." The memo does not state why the school district wanted to discharge Mrs. Sell.

Subsequent memos show that the FBI provided the Austin police with information about Mrs. Sell's political activities. The bureau told the police to turn over the material to the school district without disclosing that the FBI had provided it, the documents say.

Mrs. Sell's teaching contract was not renewed for the 1970-71 school year by the school district, but she then joined the Human Opportunities Commission as a teacher in the Head Start program, which had been turned over to the group in 1970.