

# How an FBI Thief Moved

By Norman Kempster  
Los Angeles Times

Denver

Tim Redfearn was just 12 days past his 19th birthday when he volunteered to become an FBI informant to help the government cope with violence-prone groups like the far-left Students for a Democratic Society and the far-right Minutemen.

The son of a Methodist minister, Redfearn was a second-generation pacifist who held a conscientious objector draft status as his father had before him. He never had been arrested.

That was Aug. 25, 1970. Today, a 25-year-old Redfearn faces charges in two burglaries — a July theft of records from the headquarters of the Socialist Workers Party and a June theft of furniture from the basement storage locker of an apartment house.

Redfearn's "rap sheet" also shows arrests in November, 1970, for malicious mischief, in February, 1975, for burglary, and in September, 1973, for extortion. He was not prosecuted on the malicious mischief or extortion charges and was given probation on the burglary charge.

In February, 1975, Redfearn's FBI contact agent reported that the informer had admitted committing "a series of burglaries because he was in desperate need of money."

The bureau was offended by that and cut Redfearn off the payroll for seven months. The burglaries that Redfearn admitted had no connection with his FBI informant role.

But Redfearn served his apprenticeship as a thief more than a year earlier when he stole political records, personal bank statements and other documents from the headquarters of the Socialist Workers Party and from a house where three members of the party's youth affiliate lived. There were at least four separate thefts.

The fruits of the thefts — at least two of which involved break-ins — were placed in the files of the Denver FBI field office.

The police were not notified and Redfearn was not arrested.

The story of Tim Redfearn — informant number DN 481-6 to the FBI — is told in an 18-inch stack of paper from the once-secret files of the Denver FBI office. The entire file was turned over to attorneys for the Socialist Workers Party in compliance with a court order as part of the party's \$37 million civil suit against the government.

The papers, the most complete records ever released by the FBI on the way it gets information, provide a rare glimpse into the shadowy world of the paid informer.

In that world, Tim Redfearn was a star.

Redfearn's first contact with the FBI was in 1970 when an agent asked him to identify photographs of suspects in a political violence case.

He received no pay for his effort and apparently he fingered the wrong man. But he developed a taste for aiding the bureau that dominated the next six years of his life.

The first item in Redfearn's file is a letter he wrote to Special Agent James O'Connor on Aug. 25, 1970:

"I should have written sooner, but I've been in the hospital with an abscessed tonsil," the letter began. "I

## to Private Crime

wanted to ask you what one like myself would have to do to work for the FBI. I wanted to be of help on that bus thing because such a thing made me mad. I guess (name deleted) wasn't the one, although he may have known something and just shot off his mouth . . ."

"I seem to get around quite a bit, protests, marches and such, and I know quite a bit about these people and what goes on. My appearance is such that I pass for just another person in the crowd. Let me say that I am not interested in busting people for the use of drugs. I am against the SDS and Minutemen and other groups that hide out in small mountain towns such as Idledale. I'm sure you know too that I could pull practically anything off because of my appearance."

Redfearn did fit the stereotype of a radical — shoulder-length brown hair, blue eyes, tall (6-2) and thin (160 pounds). While he seemed to think his appearance was an advantage, it gave the bureau pause.

A message from Denver to FBI headquarters in Washington dated Dec. 21, 1970, said: "While subject is a hippie type, no indication has been noted that he lives promiscuously or is a thief."

A little more than a month later, the Denver headquarters told then FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover: "Denver feels that Redfearn can be used without danger of embarrassment to the bureau and that he is stable and reliable."

Redfearn, who wanted to help the FBI prevent violence, was assigned to infiltrate the Socialist Workers Party and its youth group, the Young Socialist Alliance, Marxist organizations which advocate revolutionary change by peaceful methods. He joined the alliance and was accepted as a member of the party on July 5, two days before the burglary that exposed him as an informant.

Redfearn's detailed reports on alliance meetings show the "comrads," as he called the group's members, spent much of their time talking about lagging sales of the Socialists' newspaper, the *Militant*.

The group also held frequent parties and talked about issues near and dear to the radical left, such as the war in Vietnam, the activities of Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Union, the overthrow of the Allende government in Chile and strife in Angola. The members did not talk about violence, at least not in Redfearn's presence.

Although Redfearn's reports seldom contained any hint that a crime had been committed, the FBI clearly approved of what it was getting. The file contains dozens of messages from Denver to Washington seeking authority to raise Redfearn's pay. Ultimately, he was authorized to receive up to \$400 a month although, like all informers, he was paid strictly on a piece-work basis — cash for specific information.

In 1972 Denver told Washington, "He is spending

# A Report on 1974 Campaign Financing

Washington

House and Senate candidates spent more than \$88 million in their 1974 election campaigns and received more than 40 per cent of their funds from special interest groups and in large donations from individuals, Common Cause reported yesterday.

The citizens lobby, releasing a five-volume, 2102-page election finance study, also found that labor and business groups heavily favored incumbents with their contributions and that 24 individual donors contributed more than \$25,000 each to congressional candidates.

The study is based on reports filed by the candidates with the House and Senate clerks for the period from Sept. 1, 1973 to Dec. 31, 1974.

Fred Wertheimer, the Common Cause vice president, said the study and particularly the finding that special interest groups and individual contributors of \$500 or

more dominated the campaign financing scene, "gives a sense of the fact that we don't have a campaign finance system that is broadly based."

"It is based among people who can afford to give money or who have special financial interests they want to protect," he said.

He also said that the number of special interest committees contributing to campaigns has apparently doubled in the last 18 months, jumping from 500 to 1000, with a substantial increase in the number of committees representing businesses.

Common Cause also reported that:

- Business groups gave \$1.9 million to incumbents and \$182,000 to challengers.

- Health groups gave \$1.4 million to incumbents and \$137,000 to challengers.

- Labor groups gave \$2.8 mil-

lion to incumbents and \$1.7 million to challengers.

- Individual donors of \$500 or more contributed a total of \$22.5 million and other special interest groups gave a total of \$12.5 million.

Common Cause also found that labor groups gave more than \$5.4 million to Democrats and \$400,000 to Republicans, while business groups gave \$1.4 million to Republicans and \$900,000 to Democrats. Health groups, generally representing physicians and dentists, gave \$1.3 million to Republicans and \$500,000 to Democrats.

The study did not deal with financing presidential elections. Public financing pays for that general election campaign and a combination of public financing and private contributions pays for primary campaign expenses.

Wertheimer said that no violations of the law were found in preparing the study.

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nearly 40 hours a week on matters in which the bureau is seriously interested."

FBI inspectors consistently classed Redfearn as either "excellent" or "very good," the two highest marks in the rating system for informers.

The Denver bureau estimated that between 80 and 95 per cent of the information he provided was "reliable."

On June 20, 1973, Redfearn filed this report: "Enclosed are items stolen from the YSA local office . . . all three by five cards will be returned to proper places so that no suspicion will be aroused."

This was the only time Redfearn used the word "stolen." But on June 27, 1973, he told the bureau: "The enclosed information was removed from the Militant Bookstore . . . it will not need to be returned."

On July 5, 1973, Redfearn reported: "Some interesting facts learned from a 'borrowed' book of finances . . . Book had to be returned a little later so no one would suspect its removal. Everything cool, book returned, no one noticed."

It was against this background that Redfearn arrived at the Denver field office July 8 with four cartons of Socialist files in the trunk of his car. He told agent John V. Almon that he needed money and he assumed he would be in for a raise.

In a sworn statement later, Almon said he did not know at the time that the Socialist headquarters had been broken into.

The FBI did not inform Denver police of Redfearn's involvement in the burglary until a week later. By that time, Redfearn had been arrested in the apartment house burglary.

On July 22, agent O'Connor, who had recruited Redfearn six years earlier, wrote him a letter informing him that his relationship with the bureau had been terminated.

The FBI went easier on Redfearn after earlier scrapes with the law.

In September, 1973, Redfearn admitted writing letters threatening with bodily harm a rival for a girl's affections. He was arrested and charged with extortion. But after Redfearn's identity as an FBI informant was learned, the case was not prosecuted.

In February, 1975, Redfearn got into more serious trouble. He was arrested for a burglary unrelated to his duties as an informant. He told the bureau he needed money.

Redfearn's lawyer asked the bureau to intercede on his behalf with the district attorney. The FBI refused.

Redfearn eventually was released under a "deferred prosecution" system that the bureau said was similar to probation. Redfearn kept secret from the prosecutors his association with the bureau.

As a result of the burglary, Redfearn was suspended by the FBI until Oct. 10, 1975, when the Denver office asked to reinstate him.

In a message to Washington, the Denver office said, "Source expressed deep regret concerning his criminal activities over the recent past and has strongly insisted he would never become involved in any illegal activities in the future."