

# Secret IRS Probe of Moderates and Radicals

Washington

The Internal Revenue Service's Special Services Staff (SSS), which operated between July 1969 and August 1973 to monitor the tax records of political radicals, also investigated such moderate groups as the Urban League, the Americans for

Democratic Action and the National Council of Churches, according to confidential IRS documents made public in a Freedom of Information Act case.

The 41 documents pertaining to the Special Services Staff were released 13

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months after they were first requested under the Freedom of Information Act by the Washington-based Tax Reform Research Group, an affiliate of Ralph Nader's Public Citizen.

Besides listing the 99 organizations that were the initial targets of the SSS, the documents also show that the SSS was created the day after the White House requested that the IRS "move against leftist organizations."

On March 25, 1969, IRS Assistant Commissioner Donald Bacon asked IRS field offices to provide information on 22 radical organizations then under investigation by the Senate Government Operations Committee.

However, the documents reveal that the IRS moved to set up a special task force on "activist organizations" after receiving a telephone call from Tom Charles Huston, the White House aide who also prepared the "Huston Plan" proposing extra-legal methods to deal with political radicals.

According to the Senate Watergate Committee's final report, Huston telephoned Roger Barth, special assistant to then IRS Commissioner Randolph Thrower, "about" July 1, 1969 to request IRS to "move against

leftist organizations."

The following day, July 2, IRS officials formally decided to set up a special task force to collect information on dissident groups, the documents reveal. The task force was originally called the Activist Organizations Committee, but the name was soon changed to the Special Services Staff because of "possible criticism and embarrassment to the service if knowledge of the action being taken became known to the news media," as one of the documents put it.

On July 14, 1969, IRS assistant Commissioner Bacon sent a memorandum to all regional offices referring to the Government Operations Committee requests, and seeking any information on 55 additional organizations "or other similar type activist groups."

In addition to the groups mentioned, this list included the National Welfare Rights Organization, the National Student Association, the Unitarian Society, the Communist party and the John Birch Society, among others.

The documents do not indicate whether the White House or the IRS supplied the names.

Before it was abolished in August 1973 by IRS Commissioner Ronald Alexander, the Special Services Staff amassed files on about 3000 groups and some 8000 individuals.

One undated IRS memorandum declared: "There is ample evidence to indicate tax exempt money has been diverted into politics, civil disorders, criminal activities involving burglary, arson . . . and the printing of revolutionary publications, all aimed at destroying the economic, administrative, political, and military power of the United States government."

However, as it turned out, the investigations of political groups did not reveal seri-

ous tax cheating. According to the Joint Tax Committee of Congress, the entire operation produced only about \$100,000 of additional tax revenues during three years of operation.

Robert C. Brandon, director of the Nader tax group, declared that the documents show IRS went "far afield of its mandate to collect taxes and enforce the nation's tax laws." He also faulted IRS for delaying 13 months in releasing the documents, and then only under pressure.

This week, Congress is expected to attempt to override President Ford's veto of Freedom of Information Act amendments, which would force agencies to respond faster to requests under the act.

The documents show that IRS finally abolished the SSS in December 1973, but that 22 per cent of the old SSS files were preserved, because they involve possible tax evasion or resistance. Officials refused to disclose whether the other files were finally destroyed.

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