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F.B.I. Counterintelligence Is Under G.A.O. Scrutiny

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 29—Representative Don Edwards, Democrat of California, said today that he had ordered an investigation by the General Accounting Office into the counterintelligence programs of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The investigation was ordered in Mr. Edwards's capacity as chairman of the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Constitutional Rights and is already under way, the Representative said. G.A.O. investigators are working in the bureau's headquarters in Washington and in 10 major field offices, Mr. Edwards said.

Meanwhile, the Presidential press secretary, Ron Nessen, said that President Ford had disavowed the type of illegal counterintelligence activity described in an article today in The New York Times about the bureau's harassment of a professor at Arizona State University in 1970.

Ford View Presented

Mr. Nessen told newsmen that although he could not vouch for or deny the accuracy of the article, "I can say this President is not responsible for what may or may not have happened before . . . and has made very clear that he expects Government agencies to live up to standards of conduct he has spelled out."

Mr. Nessen said that the President had "communicated to agencies through informal talks that they should not violate the law and he expects them to live up to his expectations that they act in an ethical way."

The civil rights and constitutional rights subcommittee is conducting a widespread investigation of both the counterintelligence programs, known as "Cointelpro," and the F.B.I.'s general operations. If put off hearings on bureau matters in order to permit Edward H. Levi, Mr. Ford's nominee for Attorney General, to be confirmed and thus be available to testify as Attorney General.

Sharp Difference

Mr. Edwards, whose subcommittee is investigating the harassment incident in which F.B.I. agents attempted to discredit a former Arizona State professor, Morris J. Starsky, has drawn a sharp difference between customary F.B.I. practices and the techniques used in "Cointelpro."

Mr. Edwards, a former F.B.I. agent, said that these were bureau programs "where private citizens and private organizations, engaged in legal political activities, have been placed under surveillance, have had dossiers prepared about

them, and indeed have been illegally disrupted and harassed by the F.B.I."

Mr. Edwards said the issue was much larger than whether or not files were maintained on members of Congress.

At issue, he said, "is the entire practice of domestic intelligence by the F.B.I., including government surveillance of private persons or organizations, record-keeping of their speech and activities and the dissemination thereof."

Mr. Edwards said that he had asked the accounting officer to investigate "Cointelpro" in several main areas: the legal authority the bureau had to conduct the program; how the bureau had decided to initiate and conduct intelligence investigations of domestic groups and individuals; the manner in which the bureau has used its agents and resources in domestic intelligence, and the relationship between the bureau's intelligence operations and those of other Federal agencies and local police.

Staff aides of the subcommittee that they had received and

were checking numerous reports from citizens who believed they may have been wrongfully harassed by the F.B.I. and from others who claimed the bureau had recruited them for political undercover work.

Among the matters now under staff investigation are charges by the Socialist Workers party and the Young Socialist Alliance that the tactics of disruption used in "Cointelpro" are still being used by the bureau under other guises. When the first official confirmation of "Cointelpro" came in November, 1974, it was described as an F.B.I. program begun in 1956 and discontinued in 1971.

But Cathy Perkus, a spokesman for the Political Rights Defense Fund, said that the fund had received "Cointelpro" documents that made it appear that the program had only been discontinued as a single operation under that name.

In a 1971 F.B.I. memorandum from the man who was its intelligence chief, Charles D. Brennan, to the man who was then second in command

in the bureau, William C. Sullivan, it is noted that though "Cointelpro" is to be discontinued, "in exceptional instances where counterintelligence action is warranted, it will be considered on a highly selective individual basis with tight procedures to insure absolute secrecy."

Miss Perkus said the defense fund had amassed reports of some 50 incidents of harassment and disruption of groups and individuals that took place after the so-called 1971 cutoff date.

The bureau has not come under criticism for its investigations or interviews, but for an alleged active policy of trying to "disrupt" various groups on the domestic left and right. The case of Dr. Starsky involved the sending of an anonymous letter to a college committee studying whether he should be retained as a professor. The letter was derogatory in nature and the F.B.I.'s internal memorandums indicated that it had been sent to "tarnish" his professional reputation because of his support of anti-Vietnam war causes.