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CIA's Illegal Files on

Washington

Under the code name Operation CHAOS, the Central Intelligence Agency searched for foreign influence in domestic dissident groups and in the process engaged in illegal spying on thousands of Americans, the Rockefeller Commission reported yesterday.

"Some domestic activities of Operation CHAOS unlawfully exceeded the CIA's statutory authority, even though the declared mission of gathering intelligence abroad as to foreign influence on domestic dissident activities was proper," the commission concluded. The commission did not discuss whether any laws, other than the statutory authority, had been violated in this project.

Operation CHAOS began in 1967, at the peak of urban rioting throughout the country, and by the time it was closed out on March 15, 1974, it had generated 7200 files on Americans and created a computer index containing 300,000 names.

Among the specific abuses cited by the commission was the case of a CHAOS agent working in the congressional campaign of an unidentified candidate and regularly submitting reports to the CIA.

The Rockefeller Commission noted that CHAOS operated while the CIA was under continuing White House pressure, during the administrations of Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon, to uncover foreign influence in domestic protest groups.

White House demands persisted despite repeated CIA reports that no significant foreign influence could be found in the protest movements.

"These White House demands also seem to have encouraged top CIA management to stretch and, on some occasions, to exceed the legislative restrictions," the commission added.

The Rockefeller report also noted that CHAOS operated under extreme secrecy and outside normal channels, a situation that "prevented any effective supervision and review of its activities."

Sources have said this project was headed by Richard Ober, now of the National Security Council staff.

In February, 1968, then CIA Director Richard Helms rejected an internal agency plan called "Project 1," under which CIA agents were to infiltrate prominent dissident groups.

The project was modified to prohibit domestic penetration of dissident groups, a move the Rockefeller Commission said "clearly reflected the CIA's awareness that statutory limitations applied to the use of agents on the domestic dissident scene."

Late in 1969, "Project 2" got under way and individuals were recruited and instructed to "acquire the theory and jargon and make acquaintances in the 'New Left' while attending school in the United States."

"Following this 'reddening' or 'sheepdipping' process (as one CIA officer described it), the agent would be sent to a foreign country on a specific intelligence mission," Operation CHAOS.

"Information on both indi-

viduals and activities which was contained in the reports and which was deemed significant by CHAOS was incorporated into the raw data files of the operations and indexed into its computer system," the commission report said.

The report said case officers tried to keep their trainee agents from taking activist roles in organizations, but nonetheless:

"One of the agents became an officer in such a group, and on at least once occasion the agent provided Project 2 with copies of minutes of the group's meetings."

Thousands of Americans

"A Project 2 agent also became involved as an adviser in a United States congressional campaign and, for a limited period, furnished reports to CHAOS of behind-the-scenes activities in the campaign."

The report also cited instances in which at least three CHAOS agents infiltrated and spied on antiwar, militant left or black militant groups.

One of them "traveled a substantial distance in late 1969 to participate in and report on a major demonstra-

other of the dissident groups within the United States," the commission report said. tions held that year to protest U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia.

The third agent was sent to Washington in 1971 with instructions to "get as close as possible" to the leaders of the May Day demonstra- The commission said Helms testified "that he was not aware of the domestic use of these agents."

Associated Press