

FBI Can't Justify Acts Against King

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The FBI acknowledged yesterday that it could not justify its repeated attempts to discredit the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and many of the other victims of its disruptive counterintelligence program.

Assistant Deputy Director James B. Adams told the Senate intelligence committee that approximately 25 separate "actions" were taken against King in the 1960s, all without any "statutory basis."

The tactics against the civil rights leader included not only the bugging of his hotel rooms and a blackmail letter, but efforts to keep him from meeting with Pope Paul VI, to block him from getting an honorary university degree and even to publicize him as a "Judas."

Sen. Philip A. Hart (D-Mich.) said he was just as concerned about other victims of FBI harassment—from black activists and women's liberationists to antiwar leaders and people wrongly suspected of being Communists.

FBI documents, Hart pointed out, indicated they were subjected to efforts to break up their marriages, force them out of jobs, smear them in the eyes of parents and teachers, and in some cases perhaps even to kill one another.

Hart disclosed, for example, that on Jan. 30, 1969, FBI headquarters approved the mailing of a letter to Jeff Forte, a leader of the Blackstone Rangers gang in Chicago, asserting that the Black Panther Party there had "put out a contract on his life."

The FBI's Adams said he was sure such action was taken simply to warn him, but Hart said he suspected that it was meant "to encourage the Rangers to shoot some or all of the Panthers" in retaliation.

The anonymous mailing, Hart pointed out, was approved on the basis of a memo from the Chicago FBI office saying that it might "intensify the degree of animosity" between the two groups and prompt Forte "to take retaliatory actions."

"Consideration has been given to a similar letter to the BPP alleging a Ranger plot against the BPP leadership; however, it is not felt this would be productive, principally because the BPP at

present is not believed as violence prone as the Rangers to whom violent type activity—shooting and the like—is second nature," the Chicago FBI memo to the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover stated.

Other indications of secret FBI incitement to violence, Hart said, included the forging of letters over the signatures of local Communist Party leaders to Mafia-owned businesses attacking their employment practices.

Adams unhappily admitted that this was one of the ploys used in an undercover project called "Hoodwink."

Testifying at a three-hour hearing, Adams said such disruptive tactics are no longer practiced by the bureau and he seconded the remarks of FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley who said on NBC's "Today" show yesterday that he welcomed more congressional oversight.

Sen. Walter F. Mondale (D-Minn.) pointed out at the hearing that "this is the first time in 50 years" that the FBI has been subjected to such public scrutiny. He said the six-month Senate investigation showed the bureau time and again "employed the tactics of totalitarian societies against American citizens," ostensibly to protect the country against those it believed had totalitarian views.

Adams repeatedly defended the FBI's undertaking of the investigations—as distinct from disruptive tactics—aimed at King and others. Saying that he could speak freely only in executive session, he said the King inquiry was undertaken in the early '60s in light of suspicions of Communist influence on him or his movement. Adams added that in October, 1963, then-Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy approved the FBI's wiretapping of phones at King's Atlanta home and at offices in New York and Atlanta. (The FBI bugged King's hotel rooms under a claim of general authority granted in 1954.)

King was killed in Memphis in 1968.

The FBI offered no explanation for continuing to track King and his activities for so many years. The allegations of Communist influence, Adams agreed, were never established.