

F.B.I. Aide Terms Effort To Vilify Dr. King Illegal

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 19—A top official of the Federal Bureau of Investigation said today that there was no "statutory basis or justification" for some 25 separate incidents of bureau harassment of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. during a six-year campaign to discredit the civil rights leader.

James Adams, assistant deputy director of the F.B.I., also told members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence that he could confirm that the F.B.I. mailed Dr. King a tape recording in late 1964. Mr. Adams said he "assumed" that an anonymous threatening letter, found in bureau files, had accompanied the tape.

According to evidence given the committee, Dr. King regarded the tape recording and unsigned letter as an effort to drive him to suicide. Mr. Adams said, however, that he had read

the letter but could not conclude that its purpose was to force a suicide.

"As I read it, I don't know what it meant," he said.

Evidence concerning the letter and tape recording was given to the committee yesterday.

The letter read: "King, there is only one thing left for you to do. You know what it is. You have just 34 days in which to do it. (This exact number has been selected for a specific reason.) It has definite practical significance. You are done. There is but one way out for you."

The letter was found in F.B.I. files that had belonged to William Sullivan, former chief of the bureau's counterintelligence operation. Mr. Sullivan told committee investigators that he

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did not write the letter.

Representative Andrew Young, Democrat of Georgia, told a reporter today that such a letter and tape had been received by Dr. King shortly after he received the Nobel Peace Prize on Dec. 10, 1964.

Mr. Young was a close associate of Dr. King during the civil rights campaigns of the early 1960's.

He and other associates of the black leader, who was assassinated on April 4, 1968, have said the letter and tape from the F.B.I. reached Dr. King well after it had been sent because it had languished in unopened mail at the headquarters of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Atlanta for some days.

Mr. Adams said that the reference to 34 days in the letter made it appear that the deadline was Christmas Eve 1964.

'No Christmas Card'

Senator Frank Church, chairman of the committee, said he letter "is certainly no Christmas card."

Mr. Adams agreed. "It's improper and I can't justify its being proposed," he said.

Mr. Adams responded to generally critical questions on F.B.I. harassment tactics by saying, "we're not trying to avoid embarrassment, we're only trying to hold back the names of informants and sensitive projects." He said many of the bureau's counterintelligence projects were started by men who "felt they had a responsibility to act, and having felt this responsibility, did act." He said the projects were started at a time when cities were being burned, and there was unrest on college campuses.

"We didn't know what the end would be, he said.

Mr. Adams conceded that there was no legal authority for the harassment tactics and that F.B.I. officials cated outside authority in taking part in them. But he begged the committee for clear-cut guidelines and law on what the F.B.I.'s domestic security role should be.

"The F.B.I. is damned for doing too much and damned for doing too little," he said.

The committee staff has established that the tape sent to King in 1964 was obtained from an electronic surveillance service, or bug, placed by the F.B.I.

Committee staff members told reporters in a briefing today that F.B.I. documents showed Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy had not authorized the bureau to place bugs in premises occupied by Dr. King.

Michael Epstein, who has conducted much of the staff investigation of the King matter, said that in October 1963 the F.B.I. sought permission to install three wiretaps on Dr. King.

Several weeks later, Mr. Kennedy, then Attorney General, authorized one tap on Dr. King's home telephone in Atlanta and one on the headquarters of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which Dr. King headed, in Atlanta, as well as one on the S.C.L.C. headquarters in New York.

The bureau never sought approval to continue this surveillance, he said. Yet, testimony and F.B.I. documents submitted to the committee yesterday disclosed that the bureau had installed 16 wiretaps and bugs in eight rooms, apparently using this original authorization.

Mr. Adams said the original



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James B. Adams of F.B.I. testifying yesterday.

decision to investigate Dr. King was made because it was feared his movement was being infiltrated by members of the Communist Party. But Mr. Adams declined to discuss the details of the investigation because he said it might endanger an ongoing F.B.I. investigation.

F.B.I. sources and published accounts of Dr. King's activities have said that the bureau was concerned because two men allegedly with Communist connections were involved in Dr. King's movement.

The sources said that the bureau once recommended that President Kennedy and his brother Robert urge Dr. King to disassociate himself from the men. Dr. King did in fact reduce their role in the movement, one associate said.

Senator Church alluded to the incident today without using any names. The Idaho Democrat cited F.B.I. documents indicating that, in the case of one of the men, the bureau's field office in New York could not find evidence that he had Communist connections. The Washington headquarters wrote the New York field office disagreeing with the report on the ground there was also no evidence that the man was not associated with Communists, according to Senator Church.

Senator Philip Hart, Democrat of Michigan, a member of the committee, made public a letter proposed by the Chicago field office of the F.B.I. that was to have been sent anonymously to Jeff Fort, head of the Blackstone Rangers, a black youth gang, that said the Black Panther Party planned to have him killed.

"It is believed the above [the letter] may intensify the degree of animosity between the two groups and occasion Fort to take retaliatory action, which would disrupt the [Black Panther Party] or lead to reprisal against its leadership," the F.B.I. proposal said.

Senator Walter F. Mondale, Democrat of Minnesota, disclosed a Newark field office proposal to lace fruit with a laxative drug and ship to a Black Panther group in Jersey City. This proposal was turned down, F.B.I. documents indicate, but approval was given to send a fake telegram warning the group that food for use at a convention may have been poisoned.