

FBI framed reporter Whitten in Indian documents case

WASHINGTON — Press spokesman Ron Ziegler has described as “wrong, wrong, wrong,” our report that the White House has instructed the Justice Department to “nail” us.

We will be happy, if Ziegler is wrong, to accept President Nixon's apology for jailing Les Whitten. It remains a fact, meanwhile, that Whitten was arrested and his notes

Jack Anderson

ripped out of his hand while he was covering a story for this column. We also have evidence that his arrest was a setup.

He was charged with possessing stolen documents and converting them to his own “use and gain.” But here's the real shocker. The FBI knew the charges were false before its agents pounced on him. There are the facts, which we can now document:

For weeks, Indian leader Hank Adams had been trying to arrange the return of the documents that the Indians had taken from government files. He had managed to secure a few papers and other stolen items, which he turned over to the FBI. Agent Dennis Hyten signed a receipt for them on December 11.

Yet after the January 31 FBI raid on Adams' apartment, Hyten signed the criminal complaint, charging him with possessing stolen documents. Our FBI informants say the FBI was really laying for us and timed the raid to catch Whitten in the net.

TV film tells all

Adams' role as the negotiator, merely trying to return the stolen documents to the government, was well known. The respected Indian writer Vine Deloria, author of “We Talk, You Listen,” and “Custer Died for Your Sins,” told us all the Indians involved in the theft knew Adams wanted to return everything.

There is pictorial evidence that the FBI's undercover man, John Arellano, knew it, too. For an unshown ABC-TV film depicts Arellano, in his Indian pose, sitting right there when Adams announced the documents would be returned “in a short period of time.”

'Reasoner report'

An ABC film crew for the “Reasoner

Report” set up their camera in Adams' apartment not far from the White House on January 18. The producer, Aram Boyajian, told us a number of Indians are shown clearly in the film. Among them is none other than the FBI's informer, John Arellano, who was listening as Adams spoke.

Boyajian read us Adams' exact words from the transcript: “We have some information on the nature of the documents that were taken and know that these documents also will be returned in a short period of time. And then the government will continue to lie. They'll say, you know, they weren't really returned or some were still missing.”

Indians remember

The incident is also recalled by two prominent Indian journalists, Richard LaCourse and Tom Cook, who were present. “Johnny (the FBI undercover man) was only four feet from Hank when he was talking about getting the things back,” said LaCourse. Cook also recalled Adams' words.

This evidence of the FBI's duplicity is supported by massive additional documentation about Adams' innocent role as the middle man trying to persuade his more militant Indian colleagues to give back the stolen papers. From the White House on down, Adams spoke to government officials about retrieving and returning documents.

FBI knew the truth

Certainly, the FBI agents, who had been scurrying all over the country in a futile search for the Indian documents, read the press accounts and their own informer's reports on Adams' activities. They knew Adams was trying to collect the stolen documents from Indians around the country and return them to the government. Yet the FBI arrested the innocent negotiator, Hank Adams, after the first large stash of stolen documents reached him.

Their real object, of course, was to nail Whitten, who had persuaded Adams to let him witness the return of the documents as a reporter. Whitten, of course, had no part in stealing the documents and at no time possessed them.

Whitten is guilty only of embarrassing the Nixon Administration. The White House, apparently, would like to make this a crime.