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FBI's Emergency Arrest List

Washington

The FBI maintained a list of thousands of potential spies and saboteurs liable to arrest in case of a national emergency, it was disclosed yesterday.

A spokesman for the agency said the list was started in the early 1950s under the Subversives Control Act but was destroyed in 1971 when the law was repealed.

"Basically, it named those who by statements or actions advocated the violent overthrow of the U.S. government," he said. "The list was of people who it was believed might commit act of espionage or sabotage during a national crisis."

The spokesman said he had no idea how many people might have been included on the list.

However, the New York Times said the so-called "security index" once contained about 15,000 names.

According to the newspaper, it included all known members of the American Communist Party, suspected agents of hostile governments, several clergymen and "others . . . who posed no genuine internal security threat."

The report quoted two unnamed sources claiming firsthand knowledge of the operation.

One source said the list, though shorter, still exists in case the detention powers, repealed by Congress in 1971, come back into force.

The report said the FBI admitted keeping a list for its own administrative purposes but not with detention in mind.

One source termed the index ridiculous and said the FBI joking called it "the pick up list." The other source said the supposed purpose was to help round up possible spies or saboteurs.

The Times said an FBI spokesman first said there was no index but, after being asked to check, acknowledged that one was maintained for internal purposes. He did not elaborate.

A justice department official was quoted as saying that the list was likely to include at any given time political dissidents and Marxists, as well as members of such terrorists groups as the Weather Underground.

The report quoted another high Justice Department official as saying a group established last March by Attorney General Edward Levi had discussed the legality of maintaining the list, but it was not known what recommendation it made to Levi.

Reuters