

FBI 'Hoodwink' Ploy Detailed

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The FBI released previously secret documents yesterday describing how it used a "counterintelligence" program called "Hoodwink" in the late 1960s in an unsuccessful attempt to provoke a fight between the Communist Party and the Mafia.

"Hoodwink," a part of the counterintelligence activities known as COINTELPRO, was described in the documents as "a long-range program to disrupt the Communist Party of the United States by setting it against La Cosa Nostra (LCN)." Cosa Nostra is the term favored by the FBI to describe the Italian or Mafia elements in American organized crime.

"A dispute between the Communist Party, USA, and La Cosa Nostra would cause disruption of both groups by having each expend their energies, time and money attacking the other," an Oct. 4, 1966, document said. "This would help to neutralize the activities of both groups which are detrimental to this country." The "Hoodwink" program has been mentioned before, but until the release of the new documents it had not been described in detail.

The "Hoodwink" activities,

which took place between 1966 and 1968, consisted mainly of the FBI's fabricating leaflets and letters to the Communist Party newspaper, *The Worker*, in an effort to make it appear that the party was actively attacking "the hoodlum activities" of the Mafia.

In addition, FBI agents also tried to plant the suspicion among Mafia leaders that the Communist Party blamed them for a bombing attack on the Party's headquarters in New York.

"Hoodwink" finally was terminated because, as the FBI's New York field office observed in a memorandum dated July 31, 1968, "none of the variety of counterintelligence actions undertaken in this program have produced substantial tangible results."

COINTELPRO was started in 1954 by the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to disrupt and discredit such radical groups of the left and right as the Communist Party and Ku Klux Klan. During the 1960s, it was expanded to include black militant organizations, alleged "new left" groups and anti-Vietnam war protesters.

It was discontinued by Hoover in April, 1971, after the

news media exposed some of its activities.

According to the documents, "Hoodwink" was conceived by the FBI New York office and approved by Washington, which added the stipulation that it should not "involve publicity that might be construed as favorable to either group."

"Hoodwink's" initial effort in October, 1966, was the fabricating of a leaflet by the New York office using the name of the Communist Party and attacking "unbelievable sweatshop conditions" in a linen supply company allegedly controlled by Mafia elements.

In approving use of the leaflet, FBI headquarters in Washington advised, "To strengthen this alleged attack, add a last sentence to the leaflet: 'Let's show the hoodlums and the bosses that the workers are united against sweatshops.'"

A 1967 letter secretly written by bureau agents and sent to *The Worker* referred to articles in the press about the search for a successor to a recently deceased Mafia boss, Thomas (Three Finger

Brown) Luchese, and called the Mafia "a big business" that derives its riches from "the working and oppressed classes."

The FBI signed the letter "I. Cohen" to make it appear that it came "from a long-time Jewish reader of *The Worker*," according to a memo from the New York office. The idea was to have the letter published by *The Worker* so that "it could possibly serve to start a dispute between the Party and LCN," the memo said.

However, the newspaper failed to publish the letter. Later, other attempts to send letters to *The Worker* suffered the same fate. Other "Hoodwink" tactics, such as efforts to circulate spurious pamphlets among allegedly "hoodlum-infested" labor unions in the waterfront and trucking industries, attracted no attention.

Finally, the New York office sent Hoover its July, 1968, memo recommending that the program be discontinued.