

More Red Squad Info

Mayor, car co. Implicated

Dennis Rosenblum

1976

Lawyers involved in the State Police Red Squad case are urging people who believe they may be the victims of spying activity to request a court hearing in Lansing to view the dossiers compiled on them. And recent revelations about Detroit Police spying show that local cops were working with plant protection agents in Chrysler Corp. plants to blackball leftist organizers.

Lansing Judge Thomas Brown early in February declared the state Red Squad, called the Subversive Activities Division, to be unconstitutional and ordered the destruction of its thousands of files on March 16. Brown said, however, that anyone who makes "sufficient factual allegations of injury, damage or need to know" will be allowed to see the appropriate file before its destruction.

The Michigan office of the American Civil Liberties Union is providing free assistance to individuals in obtaining their state files. Brown's order requires people to file legal forms and have a hearing in court. The ACLU has prepared a packet of instructions and sample forms to be filed with the court, which are available by calling 961-4662 or by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the ACLU office, 808 Washington Boulevard Building, 234 State Street, Detroit, Michigan 48226.

"Ideally, as a Houston Court ruled in an ACLU suit challenging surveillance by the Houston Police Department, the state should notify all those citizens on whom files have been maintained so they would have an opportunity to view the information compiled on them," according to Howard Simon, executive director of the ACLU of Michigan.

The plaintiffs in the case, and their attorneys, are also opposing Detroit Police Red Squad spying on political activists in a separate suit. They've taken the stand that the State Police should send a letter to everyone with a file and that they have a right to see and copy their file. Brown's insistence on proof of harm is absurd, they say, because people will have to guess at how they were hurt by the police without knowing exactly what is on file or how it was used.

George Corsetti, an attorney for the activists, said, "We will therefore continue to press for everyone's right to automatically see their file."

"Why not let people just look at their files? Give everybody notice that their name is in the file. The whole question of the destruction of files is meaningless. Even if they destroy files at the Michigan State Police office they can just punch up a button to get the information."

"State Police have admitted keeping 50,000 files. The deadline date ought to be extended—March 16 is totally unrealistic. Politically active people are not the only ones in those files. People just living up to their constitutional rights are involved," said Corsetti.

Another case now in Wayne County Circuit Court before Judge James Montante involving Detroit Police spying may at least temporarily prevent destruction of the state files. The two courts are presently in conflict, with an order by Montante that the files not be destroyed as ordered by Brown. On February 24, Montante denied a request from the state for permission to go ahead with getting rid of the records; the state is now free to either appeal the ruling or to just ignore it.

This action, however, has no effect on files kept by Detroit Police, which remain unavailable except to fourteen plaintiffs in the class-action suit before Montante. Mayor Young has said he wants the files destroyed without making them available. Corsetti said Young is worried about thousands of people filing lawsuits against the city for invasion of privacy and harassment.

A former member of the city spy network gave court testimony that he was asked to gather information at times during the last few years which, he was told by his superior officer, was requested by the last three Detroit mayors including Young.

The mayor has denied ever requesting or receiving political information from the police department.

Corsetti and other attorneys for the plaintiffs in the case have received some files from Detroit Police and more are still to come. "We think the stuff they're holding back is the most sensitive stuff," says Corsetti.

Some information already uncovered shows that the Detroit Police were supplying information to employers, particularly the Chrysler Corp., in an effort to keep leftists from being hired. Chrysler has also kept its own files, used in part against plant organizers. Former police agents were hired by Chrysler to run its Plant Protection Department, which has copies of many of the Detroit Police files.

Organizers at Chrysler plants had notations written onto their personnel files to refer callers to plant security. When a former Chrysler worker applied for work elsewhere and the new employer called Chrysler to check the worker's references, he'd be given the information in the files.

General Baker, a member of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in the late sixties, was fired from a later job at the Ford Motor Co. on the basis of information supplied by Chrysler.

With untold copies of files floating around, destruction of the files in the hands of the police would now be worse than meaningless.

fifth Estate

Dennis Rosenblum
More Red Squad Info
Mayor, car co. Implicated
1976

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/270-march-1976-2/red-squad-info>
Fifth Estate #270, March, 1976

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net