

FBI Disruptions of Detroit New Left Exposed

Fifth Estate Collective

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After sifting through even a small portion of the recently released FBI Cointelpro documents detailing the government's activity in attempting to disrupt the Left in the Detroit area during the '60s and early '70s, one is alternately struck with tedium and fascination.

Tedium because of the 53,000 pages of records that describe the endless meetings, the lengthy lists of license plate numbers observed outside of those meetings, the inept descriptions of political differences, and the almost sub-literate stabs at personal profiles of those under surveillance.

Fascination because this slimy collection of lawyers and accountants took us to be much more of a threat to this system than we ever considered ourselves and there before us is the record of millions of dollars and thousands of work hours expended just to chronicle our activity. Almost all of it comes off in such a dumb, junior-G-man manner that laughter is almost always the first response; that is until the realization occurs that the threats to employers and landlords and parents of leftists were only the first line of defense. In the background lay Nixon's round-up list (much of it provided by large numbers of despicable informers) and barbed wire. The stupid, fraternity house tricks which the FBI played on groups (like putting goat shit in the heating ducts at the office of the Radical Education Project in Ann Arbor or sending phony letters hoping to create hostilities between friendly groups) was only the plan of action if it bore results. If it didn't, murder became the mode such as the FBI-inspired executions of Black Panthers Fred Hampton and Mark Clark in Chicago in 1969.

And just as in any phony democracy in Latin America, the FBI used the fascist right to carry out much of its dirty work. In Detroit, the right-wing Breakthrough organization was manipulated throughout the '60s by the FBI to direct that often violent group toward targets selected by the government agency, according to the documents. Using the device of letters from a fictitious "Lester Johnson," the FBI directed Breakthrough towards a succession of targets ranging from left-wing lawyers to liberal priests as well as violent attacks on anti-war demonstrations.

Totally unabashed by the recent exposure of this puppeteering, Donald Lobsinger, looking like someone from the cast of "Grease," was interviewed recently on TV and announced that he felt "highly complimented that the FBI...would try to influence it (Breakthrough)—to be even more effective." In other cities the FBI has established similar relationships with paramilitary groups such as the Klan throughout the South (which resulted in the death of at least one civil rights worker and the maiming of another), the Legion of Justice in Chicago, and the Secret Army Organization in San Diego which left one anti-war activist shot.

For varying reasons, the FBI singled out numerous groups and individuals for special treatment and harassment, such as the Black Panther Party as well as all black organizations, the reformist Socialist Workers Party (SWP), several leftist attorneys, and, of course, the anti-war movement. The Detroit Committee to End the War in Vietnam (DCEWV), was targeted in particular because it was responsible for some, but not all, of the anti-war activity in the Detroit area. The FBI worked hard at securing as much information as possible about the group and much of it was supplied by agents and informers.

After a long and bitter faction fight between radical independents and the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) in 1968, the DCEWV was finally taken over by the YSA and its sympathizers. As the youth group of the already agent-

riddled SWP, the YSA and its friends made up the entire steering committee of the DCEWV, which included two FBI informants who provided exact information on the group's internal operations for the Bureau.

One lesson certainly learned is that due to the extremely high level of infiltration of the SWP by police agencies, that group should never be trusted in matters of importance. However, no organization structure is immune from such police activity. The FBI documents show that the Wayne State University SDS chapter was infiltrated by an FBI informant (a law student) and other groups as well show the same pattern.

Not content with simply reporting on activities of dissident groups, the Cointelpro operation tried to disrupt the operation of these organizations by the use of agent provocateurs to push them into illegal actions or to disrupt relations between the different groups. One case in the documents, made available to the FE by researcher Russ Ballant, suggests, in the words of a later memorandum dated Jan. 23, 1970 referring to the same action, that a fake letter be sent to "further expand the rift between SDS and the Black Panther Party (BPP)."

The first draft was obviously rejected as not being inflammatory enough, since a Sept. 22, 1969 memo states, "Chicago proposes that Detroit's letter be pitched in more obscene and vulgar terms which is common to BPP speech and writing." A second draft was approved and mailed off to numerous Detroit movement groups as well as this newspaper.

The finished product was a preposterous parody of Panther rhetoric (high blown as it was) and opened thusly: "Since when do us Blacks have to swallow the dictates of the honky SDS?"; it featured similar language in the body of the letter and ended with the sentence, "The time has come for an absolute break with any non-Black group and especially those nit-shit SDS and a return to our pursuit of a pure black revolution by Blacks for Blacks." It was signed only, "Off the Pigs!" It's not known what effect it had on the other addressees, but at the FE it was met with skepticism that the BPP had, in fact, written it and was relegated to the waste basket.

Other letter writing campaigns included an FBI letter to a woman activist's parents in Pennsylvania telling of her political and alleged personal activities-in Michigan with the intent of, in the FBI's words, "neutralizing" her, according to a Cointelpro memorandum dated Nov. 13, 1969. The letter purported to be from a jilted lover and told the parents that the woman was living in "sexually mixed collectives" and that their daughter currently "has a serious infection." The FBI signed it "someone who cares."

Another memorandum, undated, proposed a letter to disrupt relationships between the Black United Front and White Panther Party in Ann Arbor and notes that the "Detroit (FBI) feels that the *Michigan Daily* (the University of Michigan student newspaper) would be delighted to publish this type of letter."

The bureau also spent part of Its time making it difficult for groups to operate even on the most elementary level. It intervened directly with the Jesuit head of the University of Detroit, Fr. Malcolm Carron, to deny the U of D SDS chapter meeting space with Memorandum DE 10035108 stating directly that the "Detroit (FBI) feels justified in claiming at least partial credit for the UD action denying SDS use of its facilities."

The Radical Education Project (REP) seemed to be a special target for the agency, which took responsibility in a 1969 memo for REP being evicted from its Ann Arbor quarters. After the group's subsequent move to Detroit, the FBI contacted the owner of their new location and advised its agents on August 6, 1969 that "if the owner can be approached without risk to the Bureau, appropriate REP printed material along with public source material will be furnished to the building owner with the goal of forcing REP to move again..." REP was involved in the highly dangerous activity of printing pamphlets.

The examples cited are only a small random sample of the FBI activity during that period and more incidents could be shown almost endlessly. The extent to which radical and anti-war groups were able to function, with the ability that they did (with notable casualties, to be sure), all the while having an entire police apparatus leveled at them, is at least a tribute to their tenacity and to the Bureau's ineptness.

Off the Pig!

All Power to the People!



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