

Records Show FBI Effort That Got Professor Fired

Agency Worked to Have Members of Trotskyite Socialist Workers Party Dismissed, Evicted

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TEMPE, Ariz.—How far did the FBI go to get Morris J. Starsky fired from his assistant professorship at Arizona State? And how far has the agency gone to harass other members of the Trotskyite Socialist Workers Party?

Those questions have been posed here and elsewhere in the last two months by the release of voluminous, although censored, records obtained from the FBI under the Freedom of Information Act.

The records show FBI agents worked clandestinely to get members of the tiny political party fired from their jobs and even evicted from their apartments.

FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley recently defended the harassment program in a letter on the Starsky case by saying that the program "was designed to counter the conspiratorial efforts of revolutionary elements in this country, as well as to neutralize extremists of both the Left and the Right who were threatening and in many instances fomenting, acts of violence."

However, so far as is known, in a record going back 30 years, the agency never has brought any criminal charges against Socialist Workers Party members for their political activity. FBI spokesmen last week declined to go into further detail about Kelley's explanation of the program,

which the FBI claims was disbanded in 1971.

In Starsky's case, the FBI documents show, agents sent a highly derogatory anonymous letter, never established as true, to members of a faculty committee studying charges of professional misconduct against the philosophy teacher. The letter was signed, "A concerned (Arizona State) alumnus."

Since other documents and parts of documents have been withheld, it is possible that other action was taken—and inquiries undertaken in Arizona recently turned up some indications that it may have been.

FBI spokesman, however, declined to respond to questions on this point.

Starsky was fired by the Arizona Board of Regents in 1970, despite the fact that two faculty committees and the president of Arizona State had recommended against his dismissal.

Since Starsky released the FBI documents (obtained by him in December) this last Jan. 29, it has become apparent that harassment of him was not an isolated act.

On March 18, the Socialist Workers Party—a Trotskyite rebel against orthodox communism and estimated to have as few as 500 members nationwide—released 3,138 pages of other FBI documents it had obtained from the agency as a result of court orders

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pursuant to a lawsuit it has filed against the government.

Nearly 600 pages of these documents refer to a program of FBI disruption of the party under the agency's Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO). This is the program the FBI says has been disbanded. But in the lawsuit the Socialist Workers are claiming it goes on under a different guise.

The documents make it clear that the FBI consistently harassed members of the SWP in a clandestine manner over 30 years.

Among the types of harassments undertaken, the documents show, were anonymous letters to landlords, employers and others notifying them of the subjects' radicalism, plants of hostile items against them in the press and efforts to encourage local police to take action against them.

In one 1968 New Jersey case, according to the documents, the FBI contacted the Boy Scouts of America in a successful effort to have a scoutmaster in Orange, N.J., removed from his job because his wife was a member of the SWP.

In California, others of the documents show, the FBI's San Francisco and Los Angeles offices sought to discourage attendance at a West Coast Vacation School near Santa Cruz sponsored by the Bay Area SWP by anonymously disseminating information that latrines at the edge of the encampment were unlighted and there was no electricity in the individual cabins.

In another case, in 1963, the FBI sent an anonymous letter, purportedly from a longshoreman, to a black candidate for mayor of San Francisco warning him that he was "committing political suicide" by allowing Socialist Workers members to work in his campaign.

SWP lawyers are pursuing efforts in federal court in New York to narrow the range of deletions the FBI has been allowed to make in the documents provided.

In the developing situation, the Starsky case presents an interesting example, which, without the new Freedom of Information Act, might have been much later in coming to light.

In the spring of 1970, when the Arizona Board of Regents fired the professor, it was unquestionably the popular thing to do.

Legislators were regularly issuing public calls for Starsky's removal, newspapers and radio stations were editorializing against him and his case had been widely publicized for months. Starsky was probably at this time the most important leader of the anti-Vietnam war movement in Arizona and his open advocacy of socialism and "communism with a small 'c'" had outraged conservative sensibilities in what has been a highly conservative state.

Just weeks before his firing, for example, the assistant philosophy professor had advocated an income tax system under which income under \$10,000 a year would be subject to no tax, and all income over \$10,000 a year would be taxed 100%.

Even though time has passed, views on such issues as the war have changed and Starsky has won some interim decisions at the U.S. district court and appeals court levels in his suit for reinstatement at Arizona State, feelings of opposition to him in Arizona still exist in many quarters today.

One persistent theme expressed in interviews is that whatever the FBI did against him in the period 1968-70, it was unnecessary, because the regents would have fired him anyway.

Two levels of federal courts have now held that the firing was politically motivated and therefore unconstitutional.

Quite beyond the documented example of the FBI sending anonymous letters to members of the faculty committee, the extensive press reports at the time of proceedings in the Starsky case contained several references to anonymous communications which could have come from the FBI.

For instance, one conservative state senator had his feelings against the professor exacerbated when he received an anonymous letter addressing him as "dear racist senator," and containing radical tracts distributed by Starsky.

According to documents released by the SWP March 18, in a number of other cases the FBI inspired adverse editorials about party members. There were a great many

adverse editorial on Starsky in Arizona, but questions as to whether any of them were inspired by the FBI draw uniform denials.

One state legislator who was active in the oust-Starsky campaign, however, told The Times that FBI agents had made encouraging remarks to him about his efforts against the professor.

State Rep. Bill Lewis said he belonged to a club, the Bolo Tie Club, in Phoenix, in which a good many FBI agents were also members. When he called for the professor's removal on the floor of the Legislature, he said, he recalled agents telling him, "Hang in there and keep after him."

The anonymous letter which, it has been disclosed, the FBI did send to the five members of the faculty committee hearing charges against Starsky alleged that the professor had, with some companions, invaded the apartment of a fellow radical at 2 a.m. one morning and threatened him with bodily harm unless he turned over some literature.

"It seems to me," the letter writer said, "that this type of activity is something that Himmler or Beria could accept with pride." Starsky denies the report, and no one has ever come forward publicly to substantiate it.

The letter was sent May 6, 1970. It had been approved, according to an FBI document of April 24, 1970, by FBI director J. Edgar Hoover on the request of the Phoenix office of the FBI, and was the apparent culmination of two years of FBI interest in Starsky as documented by the materials released.

For instance, almost two years before the regents fired Starsky, on July 1, 1968, the Phoenix office of the FBI sent Washington headquarters a prediction that Starsky would be fired.

"It was mentioned in Phoenix letter of May 31, 1968, that Morrie J. Starsky, as a public employe, is understood to be of interest and concern to (name deleted)," the censored FBI document says.

"There are now indications that as a result of this interest, which is by no means a matter of public record and is unlikely to become such, the Board of Regents . . . may soon find cause to separate Professor Starsky from the public payroll . . . Starsky's dismissal from the ASU (Arizona State) faculty could be expected to disrupt New Left organizations at Arizona State University and in the Phoenix area generally.

"In any event, Phoenix will explore means of assuring that (deleted) is cognizant of the role which Starsky and others in the ASU Philosophy Department play in keeping the New Left alive (deleted) . . ."

Three months later, on Oct. 1, 1968, the FBI's Phoenix office reported to Washington headquarters, "Morris J. Starsky, by his actions, has continued to spotlight himself as a target for counterintelligence action. He and his wife were both named as presidential electors by and for the Socialist Workers Party when the SWP in August, 1968, gained a place on the ballot in Arizona . . . A recommendation for counterintelligence action as to Starsky will be

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Submitted by separate letter."

On April 7, 1970, Phoenix FBI requested approval for sending the anonymous letter to members of the family committee and 17 days later a message from Hoover granted the authority and instructed, "Closely follow this matter and keep the Bureau advised of results."

On June 30, 1970, Phoenix FBI informed Washington that the Regents had dismissed Starsky and concluded that "(deleted) advised that the various charges against Starsky brought out during this hearing and other anonymous charges received by the faculty committee members greatly tarnished Starsky's reputation and standing in the academic community."

In addition to the deletions, made according to the Atty. attorney general then, William B. Saxbe, in order to protect the privacy of certain individuals and the identities of FBI informants, four documents of the FBI's COINTELPRO file on Starsky were withheld altogether.

Inquiries by a Times reporter in the Phoenix office of the FBI drew "no comments," and inquiries directed to the agency's Washington headquarters were not much more availing.

An FBI spokesman in Washington said he was not free to explain the rationale behind the FBI's actions against Starsky or to comment on why the FBI was so concerned about the activities of the SWP.

Asked for an evaluation of the party's significance, the spokesman said he would not give one himself, but he referred the reporter to a March 24 article in the New York Times.

Reference to this article, entitled "The FBI's Appetite for Very Small Potatoes," found that it was a commentary by writer Nicholas M. Horrocks in which Horrocks belittled the FBI for spending so many man hours and money pursuing a tiny group of such insignificance.

"Why, entirely aside from the question of right or wrong," was such an unproductive inquiry maintained for so long?" Horrocks asked.

When the FBI spokesman was contacted again, he said he had been mistaken in referring the reporter to the March 24 article. Instead, he said, he would send by mail a Feb. 19, 1975, speech on the party by a congressman.

The speech, by Rep. Larry McDonald (D-Ga.), one of two members of the John Birch Society who holds a seat in Congress, arrived from the FBI at The Times Friday.

In it, McDonald brands the party, "a totalitarian Communist party" which supports guerrillas in many countries, although he concedes that it has opposed orthodox Soviet communism.

The only real FBI comment on the Starsky case came in February in an exchange of correspondence with William W. Van Alstyne, of Duke University, president of the American Assn. of University Professors.

On Feb. 2, Van Alstyne had written Atty. Gen. Saxbe complaining about FBI actions against Starsky.

On Feb. 12, responding to the letter, FBI director Kelley, wrote, "There are various reasons that prevent me from making full disclosure of the factors which resulted in Professor Starsky becoming a subject of an FBI counterintelligence program."

"I can state, however, this was not part of a planned attack on the academic community, nor a program designed

to stifle dissent or freedom of expression with regard to United States Vietnam or other policies during the pertinent period.

"I have studied the FBI's counterintelligence program, as implemented during the period 1956-71 and which included the incident involving Professor Starsky, with great interest and concern," Kelley went on.

"The comment that certain FBI activity in this regard could only be considered 'adhorrent in a free society,' which you referred to in your letter, was made by former Atty. Gen. Saxbe on Nov. 18, 1974, in connection with his release of the report regarding FBI counterintelligence activities.

"On the same date, I issued a statement calling attention to the fact this program was designed to counter the conspiratorial efforts of revolutionary elements in this country, as well as to neutralize extremists of both the Left and Right who were threatening, and in many instances, fomenting, acts of violence.

"I also expressed my view in this statement that FBI employes involved acted entirely in good faith and noted that each of these counterintelligence programs bore the approval of then-Director J. Edgar Hoover. . ."