

Domestic Terrorism: Notes on the State System of Oppression

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Beginning in the fall of 1971, some curious events took place in Detroit, Michigan. In late October, lists of supporters, contributors, and subscribers to the party newspaper were stolen from the campaign headquarters of the Michigan Socialist Workers party. A few months later, the home of a Socialist Workers party organizer was robbed. Valuables were ignored, but membership lists and internal party bulletins were stolen. The burglaries remain unsolved.

If we ask who might be interested in obtaining the stolen material, a plausible hypothesis suggests itself. The natural hypothesis gains support from the fact that persons whose names appeared on the stolen lists were then contacted and harassed by FBI agents, and a personal letter of resignation from the party, apparently stolen from headquarters, was transmitted by the FBI to the Civil Service Commission. Information that has since been obtained about FBI activities, including burglaries over many years, lends further plausibility to the conclusion that the FBI was engaged in one of its multifarious endeavors to undermine and disrupt activities that fall beyond the narrow bounds of the established political consensus.

The Detroit events recall another incident which, with its aftermath, became the major news story of 1974. But it would be misleading to compare the Detroit burglaries to the Watergate caper. If, indeed the FBI was responsible, as seems most likely, then the Detroit burglaries are a far more serious matter. If the conclusion is correct, then in Detroit it was the political police of the national government which, in their official function, were engaged in disrupting the “sanctity of the democratic process,” not merely a gang of bunglers working “outside the system.”¹

The ousting of Richard Nixon for his misdeeds was described in the nation’s press as “a stunning vindication of our constitutional system.”² The Detroit example, and others far more serious

¹ In August 1986, U.S. District Court Judge Thomas Griesa ruled in favor of the Socialist Workers Party in a civil suit against the Attorney General, declaring “the FBI’s disruption activities, surreptitious entries and use of informants” to be “violations of the constitutional rights of the SWP.” Among numerous FBI crimes, Judge Griesa’s decision identified at least 208 “surreptitious entries,” though the specific Detroit case was not listed. For the text of the decision, see *A Fight for Political Rights* (Political Rights Defense Fund, n.d.).

² Henry Steele Commager, “The Constitution Is Alive and Well,” *New York Times*, August 11, 1974. Commager, who has been forceful in defense of civil liberties and opposition to the Indochina war, states that prior to Nixon, “no President has ever attempted to subvert” the Constitution or “challenged the basic assumptions of our constitutional system itself.” But “the system worked” and the challenge was defeated.

to which I return, suggest a rather different reaction. There is a fundamental distinction between Watergate and Detroit. In the case of the events surrounding Watergate, the victims were men of power who are expected to share in the ruling of society and the formation of ideology. In Detroit the victims were outsiders, fair game for political repression of a sort that is quite normal. Thus it is true, in a sense, that the punishment of Nixon and his cohorts was a vindication of our system, as this system actually operates in practice. The Nixon gang had broken the rules, directing against the political center a minor variant of the techniques of repression that are commonly applied against radical dissent. If the basic work of repression continues after Nixon, without appreciable comment or concern, then this too will show that the system is functioning, quite in accord with ample historical precedent.

Even assuming FBI involvement, the Detroit incident is nevertheless minor in comparison with other facts exposed during the 1970s. From December 1973, the government was compelled through several civil suits to release documentary evidence concerning its various campaigns to undermine and disrupt legal activities directed to social change or simply protest against state policy, through the decade of the 1960s. In comparison with these revelations, the whole Watergate affair was a tea party. The documents and depositions made public during this period, and revelations by disaffected government agents, lay bare a systematic and extensive program of terror, disruption, intimidation, and instigation of violence, initiated under the most liberal Democratic administrations and carried further under Nixon. The Department of Justice, in its apologetic and fragmentary review, asserts that the "counterintelligence program" (Cointelpro) operations "were apparently not reported to any of the Attorneys General in office during the periods in which they were implemented," apart from "certain aspects of the Bureau's efforts to penetrate and disrupt the Communist Party USA and White Hate Groups."³ Assuming this assertion to be true, we may still observe that government officials who had even a passing familiarity with FBI practices in the past had a definite responsibility to determine how the Bureau was acting under their authority.

A review of these programs demonstrates the relative insignificance of the charges raised against Nixon and his associates, specifically, the charges presented in the Congressional Articles of Impeachment.⁴ Further insight into the state of American society can be derived by the following simple exercise: compare the attention focused on the Watergate episodes by the mass media, including the liberal press and journals of opinion, with the reaction to the exposures, during exactly the same period, of the FBI programs. This exercise will demonstrate that until the dust had settled over Watergate, there was virtually no mention of the government programs of violence and disruption or comment concerning them, and even after the Watergate affair was successfully concluded, there has been only occasional discussion. The *New Republic*, which, during the Watergate period, could fairly be considered the semiofficial organ of American liberalism, was unconcerned by these exposures, though hardly an issue passed without a denunciation of Nixon for his crimes, trivial by comparison. With a few honorable exceptions (specifically, the *Nation*), the same was true more generally. The Watergate affair thus reveals quite clearly the subservience of the media to power and official ideology. The example is a particularly telling one, given that the media are so commonly hailed for their courage and independence in exposing

³ Press release of the Department of Justice, released by Attorney General William B. Saxbe and FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley, November 18, 1974.

⁴ See *New York Times*, August 4, 1974, for documents and commentary.

the petty criminality of the Watergate affair — petty, that is, in comparison to the real criminal acts of the state exposed during the same period, but not by the media.

The lesson of Watergate is simple. American liberalism and the corporate media will defend themselves against attack. But their spirited acts of self-defense are not to be construed as a commitment to civil liberties or democratic principle, despite noble and self-serving rhetoric. Quite the contrary. They demonstrate a commitment to the principle that power must not be threatened or injured. The narrow “elites” that control the economy, political life, and the system of conventional doctrine must be immune to the means of harassment that are restricted, in the normal course of events, to those who raise a serious challenge to ruling ideology or state policy or established privilege. An “enemies list” that includes major corporate leaders, media figures, and government intellectuals is an obscenity that is seen as shaking the foundations of the republic. The involvement of the national political police in the assassination of Black Panther leaders, however, barely deserves comment in the national press, including the liberal press and journals, with rare exceptions.

The Cointelpro operations of the 1960s were modeled on the successful programs of earlier years undertaken to disrupt the American Communist Party. Though details are unknown, these programs were no secret, and were generally regarded as legitimate. The programs directed against the Communist party continued through the 1960s, with such interesting innovations as Operation Hoodwink from 1966 through mid-1968, designed to incite organized crime against the Communist party through documents fabricated by the FBI, evidently in the hope that criminal elements would carry on the work of repression and disruption in their own manner, by means that may be left to the imagination.⁵

From the evidence now available, it appears that the first FBI disruption program (apart from the CP) was launched in August 1960 against groups advocating independence for Puerto Rico. In October 1961, the “SWP Disruption Program” was put into operation against the Socialist Workers Party. The grounds offered, in a secret FBI memorandum, were the following: the party had been “openly espousing its line on a local and national basis through running candidates for public office and strongly directing and/or supporting such causes as Castro’s Cuba and integration problems...in the South.” The SWP Disruption Program, put into operation during the Kennedy administration, reveals very clearly the FBI’s understanding of its function: to block legal political activity that departs from orthodoxy, to disrupt opposition to state policy, to undermine the civil rights movement.

These basic commitments were pursued in subsequent years. For example, the Phoenix office of the FBI noted in a memorandum of October 1, 1968, that Professor Morris Starsky of Arizona State University, “by his actions, has continued to spotlight himself as a target for counterintelligence action.” These “actions” consisted of the following crimes against the state: “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. In addition they have signed themselves as treasurer and secretary respectively of the Arizona SWP.” Nothing further is alleged, though an earlier memorandum (May 31, 1968) identifies Starsky as one of those who have provided “inspiration and leadership” for “New left organizations and activities in the Phoenix metropolitan areas,” so that he is one of “the most logical targets for potential counterintelligence action.” The

⁵ John M. Crewdson, “Levi Reveals more Harassment by F.B.I.,” *New York Times*, May 24, 1975. Also AP, *Boston Globe*, May 24, 1975.

memorandum suggests that “reliable and cooperative contacts in the mass media” should be helpful in this particular program of “Disruption of the New Left.” The documents in the Starsky case also indicate that prior to the targeting of Starsky on October 1, the FBI had somehow influenced the board of regents that controls the university to “find cause to separate Professor STARSKY from the public payroll” on trumped-up charges.⁶

Similarly, the comprehensive program to “expose, disrupt, and otherwise neutralize the activities of the various New Left organizations, their leadership and adherents,” secretly put into operation in May 1968, was motivated by the fact that New Left activists “urge revolution,” are responsible for unspecified “violence and disruption,” “call for the defeat of the United States in Vietnam,” and “continually and falsely allege police brutality and do not hesitate to utilize unlawful acts to further their so-called cause.” They have even “on many occasions viciously and scurrilously attacked the Director and the Bureau in an attempt to hamper our investigation of it

⁶ Memorandum of July 1, 1968. This is not the only example of FBI efforts to interfere in academic affairs. Attorney General Edward Levi testified before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence that “he had once been a recipient of a counterintelligence letter aimed at discrediting a professor at the university” (he was then president of the University). An anonymous letter was sent by the FBI to the board of trustees and the press concerning the antiwar activities of Richard Flacks (“who was later beaten by an unidentified assailant for his political views,” a few months after “members of a radical right-wing group called the Legion of Justice had attacked students”). *N.Y. Times*, December 19, 1975. The letter was sent in the hope that “it may discourage Flacks or even result in his ultimate removal from the University of Chicago” (FBI memorandum, Aug. 2, 1968), but without discernible results, the Bureau reported. In another case, “the FBI approved furnishing information to a responsible Harvard University official that a student who was employed by the University was involved in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) activities. Shortly thereafter, the student lost his job” (Report of the House Select Committee on Intelligence, citing a Cointelpro memorandum, *Village Voice* supplement, February 16, 1976; henceforth, Pike Committee Report). The Pike Committee report was published in England: *CIA: The Pike Report* (Spokesman, 1977). To my knowledge, no American publisher (and no major publisher anywhere) found this very revealing material sufficiently significant to merit publication.

One such case involved me personally. In the fall of 1969, the Boston office of the FBI forwarded to the Director a proposal to block the reappointment of two instructors in a course that I was teaching (along with Louis Kampf) by furnishing some unidentified person within MIT with “numerous public source data” concerning their backgrounds, “which identifies their connections and associations with SDS and the BDRG (Boston Draft Resistance Group)” and with a “defunct radical paper” and a “radical film-making group.” “It is believed that if MIT is in possession of all the public source material concerning [blank] and [blank] they would not reappoint them to their respective positions with the Humanities Department at MIT. This counterintelligence action would also frustrate [blank] who has been attempting to build up the Humanities Department of MIT with radical-type instructors such as [blank] and [blank].” The person to be “frustrated,” judging by the number of letters blanked out, is presumably Louis Kampf. The FBI Director authorized the action, ordering that “you are to impress upon [blank; presumably the contact within MIT] the necessity for keeping the Bureau’s interest in this matter in the strictest confidence.” A subsequent memorandum from the Boston office states that “On 8/18/69 [blank], Mass. Institute of Technology (MIT), Cambridge, Mass., an established source of the Boston Office, advised that as a result of the public source material that was furnished confidentially to him relating to [blank] and NICHOLAS EGLESON he was able to have their re-appointments to the staff of MIT canceled. [Blank] and EGLESON’s reappointment as an instructor was considered to be automatic. [Blank] was very grateful for the public source data received and indicated that all aspects of this operation would be kept confidential. Boston will remain alert for any other potential counter intelligence actions in regard to captioned group.” FBI memoranda of 6/20/69, 7/7/69, 8/21/69, provided to Nicholas Egleson under legislation requiring that Cointelpro targets be given documents concerning them. The second person prefers to remain unidentified.

The established source of the Boston FBI office within MIT, however, was not telling the truth in this case, as I am impelled to inform the Boston office, fulfilling my patriotic duty as a servant of the state. Neither of the two instructors requested reappointment. There was, to my knowledge, no inquiry within MIT to determine who is the established source of the Boston FBI Office within the university, after this information was made public.

In the absence of systematic inquiry, one can only guess as to the scope and character of FBI-university connections devoted to subversion of academic freedom.

and to drive us off the college campuses,” where, naturally, the state’s political police should be free to operate with impunity. The latter offense was particularly grave since, as is now known, FBI provocateurs were engaged in extensive efforts throughout the country to instigate campus violence, disrupt student groups, eliminate radical faculty, and the like, and FBI agents were, for example, engaged in such actions as stealing documents from campus groups and burglarizing the offices of professors supporting them.⁷

The commitment of the FBI to undermine the civil rights movement, despite an elaborate pretense to the contrary (and even some actions as government policy vacillated on the issue), will come as no surprise to people with first-hand experience in the South in the early 1960s. As late as summer 1965, FBI observers refused to act within their legal authority to protect civil rights demonstrators who were being savagely beaten by police and thrown into stockades (some, who tried to find sanctuary on federal property, were thrown from the steps of the federal building in Jackson, Mississippi, by federal marshals). These efforts continued in later years, as, for example, when the FBI, under Cointelpro, succeeded in driving a black minister from the Jackson Human Rights Project in early 1969, causing him to leave the South altogether, by sending him a “spurious, threatening letter” and encouraging school and church officials to file complaints against him on the basis of charges which (according to his ACLU lawyer) were fabricated by the Bureau and “derogatory” information provided by the Bureau.⁸

There is no dearth of other examples to illustrate what the Pike Committee Report calls “FBI racism.” The campaign to discredit Dr. Martin Luther King is a case that is now well-known. In October 1963 the FBI sought permission, which was granted by Attorney General Robert Kennedy, to install wiretaps on King’s home telephone and at two offices of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which King headed. In November 1964 the FBI sent King the following unsigned note:

King, there is only one thing left for you to do. You know what it is. You have just 34 days in which to do it. (This exact number has been selected for a specific reason.) It has definite practical significance. You are done. There is but one way out for you.

Enclosed was a tape obtained from electronic surveillance. The note was received 34 days before Dr. King was to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, and was, quite naturally, taken to be an effort to drive him to suicide. The Bureau also harassed the Mississippi Freedom Democratic party in 1964 and attempted to destroy two civil rights groups in St. Louis by sending forged letters accusing members of marital infidelity, in 1969 and 1970. The Bureau took credit for helping to break up the marriage of a white activist, who was forced to curtail her civil rights work, by these means. An FBI memo reads: “While the letter sent by the St. Louis division was probably not the sole cause of this separation, it certainly contributed very strongly.”⁹ The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* commented editorially (November 19, 1975) that these disclosures make it “hard to imagine that there was any tactic too sordid for this federal agency to use,” referring to the efforts “to undermine the effectiveness of ACTION and the Black Liberators in St. Louis,” and the general program of which they were a part.

⁷ On the latter, see Vin McLellan, “FBI Heists Names of 1970 Student Strikers,” *Boston Phoenix*, March 5, 1974, based on the report of former security officers at Brandeis University.

⁸ John M. Crewdson, “Black Pastor Got F.B.I. Threat in ‘69,” *New York Times*, March 17, 1975.

⁹ Nicholas M. Horrock, *N.Y. Times*, November 19, 20, 1975; Robert Adams and Martha Shirk, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 19, 1975.

In still another example under Cointelpro, revealed in the Pike Committee Report:

the FBI authorized interfering with a Mellon Foundation's decision of whether to give Unity Corporation, a black organization in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a \$150,000 grant. The FBI contacted a confidential source within the Mellon Foundation, the grant was denied, and the Unity Corporation subsequently went bankrupt.

Chalk up another victory for law and order. We return directly to examples of "FBI racism" of a considerably more serious nature.

Predictably, the most serious of the FBI disruption programs were those directed against "Black Nationalists." These programs, also initiated under liberal Democratic administrations, had as their purpose "to expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize the activities of black nationalist, hate-type organizations and groupings, their leadership, spokesmen, membership, and supporters, and to counter their propensity for violence and civil disorder." Agents were instructed "to inspire action in instances where circumstances warrant." Specifically, they were to undertake actions to discredit these groups both within "the responsible Negro community" and to "Negro radicals," also "to the white community, both the responsible community and to 'liberals' who have vestiges of sympathy for militant black nationalists simply because they are Negroes..."

Several model actions were proposed to agents, who were instructed "to take an enthusiastic and imaginative approach to this new counterintelligence endeavor," including an action apparently directed against the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1967, in which local police, alerted by the FBI, arrested leaders "on every possible charge until they could no longer make bail" so that they "spent most of the summer in jail and no violence traceable to [blank] took place." In this case too, agents were directed to use "established local news media contacts" and other "sources available to the Seat of Government" to "disrupt or neutralize" these organizations and to "ridicule and discredit" them. In the light of these documents, one cannot fail to recall the elaborate subsequent campaign, in this case abetted by several liberal intellectuals and democratic socialists, to ridicule and discredit individuals who attempted to raise funds for the Black Panthers during the period when they were being subjected to extensive police and judicial attack.

Among the most remarkable of the revelations concerning the FBI campaigns against black groups are those relating to the attempts to exploit gang warfare and incite murderous attacks, which have now come to light in several cities. A Cointelpro memo mailed November 25, 1968, informs recipient offices that:

a serious struggle is taking place between the Black Panther Party (BPP) and the US organization. The struggle has reached such proportions that it is taking on the aura of gang warfare with attendant threats of murder and reprisals.

In order to fully capitalize upon BPP and US differences as well as to exploit all avenues of creating further dissension in the ranks of the BPP, recipient offices are instructed to submit imaginative and hard-hitting counterintelligence measures aimed at crippling the BPP.

A series of cartoons were produced in an effort to incite violence between the Black Panther party and US (a second black group), for example, one showing Panther leader David Hilliard

hanging dead with a rope around his neck from a tree, with two US members below, one saying to the other: "He really was a paper tiger," and other comparably imaginative creations. The San Diego office reported to the director that:

in view of the recent killing of BPP member SYLVESTER BELL, a new cartoon is being considered in the hopes that it will assist in the continuance of the rift between BPP and US. This cartoon, or series of cartoons, will be similar in nature to those formerly approved by the Bureau and will be forwarded to the Bureau for evaluation and approval immediately upon their completion.

Under the heading "TANGIBLE RESULTS" the memo continues as follows:

Shootings, beatings, and a high degree of unrest continues to prevail in the ghetto area of southeast San Diego. Although no specific counterintelligence action can be credited with contributing to this over-all situation, it is felt that a substantial amount of the unrest is directly attributable to this program.

Under the same heading, the memo reports that "the BPP Breakfast Program appears to be floundering in San Diego due to lack of public support and unfavorable publicity concerning it." The "unfavorable publicity" included anonymous telephone calls placed by the Bureau to Auxiliary Bishop [blank] "protesting the BPP Breakfast Program and Father [blank] participation therein." Additional calls were proposed, since earlier ones had proven so effective in blocking this program to distribute free breakfasts to the poor.

The Chicago office was even more imaginative. On January 30, 1969, it received permission, as requested, to mail the following letter to Jeff Fort, leader of the Blackstone Rangers:

Brother Jeff:

I've spent some time with some Panther friends on the west side lately and I know what's been going on. The brothers that run the Panthers blame you for blocking their thing and there's supposed to be a hit out for you. I'm not a Panther, or a Ranger, just black. From what I see these Panthers are out for themselves not black people. I think you ought to know what their up to. I know what I'd do if I was you. You might hear from me again.

A black brother you don't know.

"Their thing" was an attempt by the Panthers to politicize the Blackstone Rangers, described by the Chicago office of the FBI as a group "to whom violent type activity, shooting, and the like, are second nature."¹⁰

¹⁰ With the successful destruction of the Panthers and their political work, the Rangers kept to full-time criminal activity. Under Fort's leadership, the gang (later called El Rukns) became "the first super gang, or corporate-type gang" in the country, according to University of Chicago professor Irving Spergel, an expert on street gangs. Twenty-one members were defendants in a 1991 criminal trial. Fort, who still heads the gang, is in federal prison on two concurrent sentences (75 and 80 years). Rev. George Clements, a Catholic priest working in the area, describes Fort as a "dynamic" leader who "could have been Mayor of Chicago or something...if you could have turned [him] around in the early days." Don Terry, "In Chicago Courtroom, Nation's First Super Gang Fights for Life, *New York Times*, May 19, 1991; no mention is made of the earlier U.S. government connection, or the possibility that Fort might well have been "turned around" had the state authorities permitted political activism to proceed.

The purpose of the letter was explicit. It was sent “in anticipation that its receipt by Fort will intensify the degree of animosity existing between these two Black extremist organizations.” It is obvious how a “violence-prone” gang might be expected to respond to the information that the Black Panther Party had “a hit out” for its leader.

Releasing these documents, the Senate Select Committee noted that the Chicago office proposal of December 16, 1968, came shortly after an alleged shooting incident between Rangers and Panthers, though one Ranger reportedly told police that the incident was in fact a meeting “called because the Panthers wanted to ask the Rangers to stop street killings.”¹¹

The FBI effort to incite gang war and murder in Chicago failed. It seems that the Panthers and Rangers understood very well just what was happening. The Chicago office of the FBI then turned to some new ideas, to which we return directly.

The Pike Committee Report cites other examples illustrating FBI programs concerning black groups. In another case, an anonymous letter was sent to the Black Panther party accusing a member of being a police informant. In yet another, a threatening letter was sent to Huey Newton “purporting to be from a follower of Eldridge Cleaver.” These were both under Cointelpro. The intent can easily be imagined.

During these years, FBI provocateurs repeatedly urged and initiated violent acts, including forceful disruption of meetings and demonstrations on and off university campuses, attacks on police, bombings, and so on. Meanwhile, government agencies financed, helped organize, and supplied arms to right-wing terrorist groups that carried out fire-bombings, burglaries, and shootings, all with the knowledge of the government agencies responsible¹² — in most cases the FBI, although one right-wing terrorist in Chicago claims that his group was financed and directed in part by the CIA.¹³ One FBI provocateur resigned when he was asked to arrange the bombing of a bridge in such a way that the person who placed the booby-trapped bomb would be killed. This was in Seattle, where it was revealed that FBI infiltrators had been engaged in a campaign of arson, terrorism, and bombings of university and civic buildings, and where the FBI arranged a robbery, entrapping a young black man who was paid \$75 for the job and killed in a police ambush.¹⁴ In another case, an undercover operative who had formed and headed a pro-Communist Chinese organization “at the direction of the bureau” reports that at the Miami Republican convention he incited “people to turn over one of the buses and then told them that if they really wanted to blow the bus up, to stick a rag in the gas tank and light it” (they were unable to overturn the vehicle). The same ex-operative contends that Cointelpro-type operations, allegedly suspended in April 1971, were in fact continuing as late as mid-1974, when he left the Bureau’s employ.¹⁵

¹¹ Harry Kelly, “FBI spurred gang fight in Chicago, Senate says,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 20, 1975. The head of the FBI Chicago field office at the time that the letter was sent testified in federal court that its purpose was entirely nonviolent, and that it would not have been approved “if it had referred to violence of any kind” (Rob Warden, *Chicago Daily News*, February 11, 1976).

¹² For a review of some of these actions, see Dave Dellinger, *More Power than We Know* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975); Gary T. Marx, “Thoughts on a Neglected Category of Social Movement Participant: The Agent Provocateur and the Informant,” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 80, no. 2 (September 1974, pp. 402–42).

¹³ Mike Royko, *Chicago Daily News*; *Boston Globe*, February 1, 1975. Royko’s source refused to take his information to the investigating agencies, on the grounds that “these local prosecutors...were involved in the same kind of thing” and will “wind up looking at themselves in a mirror.”

¹⁴ For information on these and other FBI actions in Seattle, see Dellinger, *op. cit.*, and Frank J. Donner, “Hoover’s Legacy,” *Nation*, June 1, 1974.

¹⁵ John M. Crewdson, “Ex-Operative Says He Worked for F.B.I. To Disrupt Political Activities up to ’74,” *New York Times*, February 24, 1975.

Many details are now available concerning the extensive campaign of terror and disruption waged by the government during these years, in part through right-wing paramilitary groups organized and financed by the national government but primarily through the much more effective means of infiltration and provocation. In particular, much of the violence on campus can be attributed to government provocateurs. To cite a few examples, the Alabama branch of the ACLU argued in court that in May 1970 an FBI agent “committed arson and other violence that police used as a reason for declaring that university students were unlawfully assembled”¹⁶ — 150 students were arrested. The court ruled that the agent’s role was irrelevant unless the defense could establish that he was instructed to commit the violent acts, but this was impossible, according to defense counsel, since the FBI and police thwarted his efforts to locate the agent who had admitted the acts to him. William Frapolly, who surfaced as a government informer in the Chicago Eight conspiracy trial, an active member of student and off-campus peace groups in Chicago, “during an antiwar rally at his college,...grabbed the microphone from the college president and wrestled him off the stage” and “worked out a scheme for wrecking the toilets in the college dorms...as an act of antiwar protest.”¹⁷

Perhaps the most shocking story concerns the assassination of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark by Chicago police directed by the state’s attorney office on December 4, 1969, in a predawn raid on a Chicago apartment. Hampton, one of the most promising leaders of the Black Panther party, was killed in bed, perhaps drugged. Depositions in a civil suit in Chicago reveal that the chief of Panther security and Hampton’s personal bodyguard, William O’Neal, was an FBI infiltrator. O’Neal gave his FBI “contacting agent,” Roy Mitchell, a detailed floor plan of the apartment, which Mitchell turned over to the state’s attorney’s office shortly before the attack, along with “information” — of dubious veracity — that there were two illegal shotguns in the apartment. For his services, O’Neal was paid over \$10,000 from January 1969 through July 1970, according to Mitchell’s affidavit.

The availability of the floor plan presumably explains why “all the police gunfire went to the inside corners of the apartment, rather than toward the entrances,” and undermines still further the pretense by the police that the police barrage was caused by confusion in unfamiliar surroundings that led them to believe, falsely, that they were being fired upon by the Panthers inside.¹⁸ Agent Mitchell was named by the *Chicago Tribune* as head of the Chicago Cointelpro directed against the Black Panthers and other black groups. Whether or not this is true, there is now substantial evidence of direct FBI involvement in this Gestapo-style political assassination.

O’Neal, incidentally, continued to report to Mitchell after the raid. He was taking part in meetings with the Hampton family and discussions between lawyers and clients, one of many such examples of violation of the lawyer-client relation. To cite another, which did receive considerable publicity, the chief security officer of the American Indian Movement, also a paid FBI informer, “was the only person, other than defendants and lawyers, with regular access to the room in which defense strategy was planned.” So valuable were his services during this period

¹⁶ *Civil Liberties*, no. 273, December 1970; publication of the ACLU.

¹⁷ Dellinger, *op. cit.* Many such cases have been exposed throughout the country.

¹⁸ John Kifner, “F.B.I. Gave Chicago Police Plan of Slain Panther’s Apartment,” *New York Times*, May 25, 1974. Although the act of FBI involvement in the Hampton assassination, along with other details of this major state crime, was not widely publicized outside of Chicago, nevertheless there were a few reports, such as this one. There can be no excuse for the general silence on this matter, which alone overshadows the entire Watergate Affair by a substantial margin.

that his cash payment from the Bureau was raised from \$900 to \$1,100 a month. “The Government, in a sworn affidavit at the trial, had appeared to contend that it had no informer in the defense ranks.” The informer, who came to believe that AIM was, in his words, a “legal, social organization that wasn’t doing anything wrong,” reports also that he helped lead an armed takeover of a state office building in Iowa, among other tasks performed for the FBI.¹⁹

There has as yet been no systematic investigation of the FBI campaign against the Black Panther party in Chicago, as part of its nationwide program of political repression. But on the basis of the scattered information that has come to light, it is possible to offer some speculations as to how FBI plotting may have progressed. The efforts of late 1968 and early 1969 to instigate gang warfare — specifically, to incite the Rangers to murder leaders of the Black Panthers — ended in failure. In subsequent months, it seems that the Panthers began to achieve some success in moving the Blackstone Rangers from criminal activities to political concerns. Members of the Rangers were living in the apartment where Hampton and Clark were assassinated. Hampton was proving an effective leader, particularly worrisome to the political police because of his express distaste for violence and inflammatory rhetoric and his emphasis on constructive political action. As long as the Rangers were just a criminal gang terrorizing the black ghetto, they were of little concern to the FBI — except, of course, insofar as their tendency towards violence could be exploited for the FBI’s campaign of political repression. But an alliance with the Panthers, particularly under the leadership of someone like Fred Hampton, was another matter. It is possible that such an analysis led the Chicago office of the FBI, operating within the framework of Cointelpro, to set in motion the events of December 4, 1969. This, of course, remains speculation. To determine what truth there may be in this reconstruction it would be necessary to conduct a serious investigation of FBI attempts to foment murder, violence and gang warfare, and of the FBI involvement in the police raid on the Panther apartment. Neither the House nor the Senate Select Committee attempted to draw the evidence together or to pursue it, so far as publicly available evidence indicates. As for the press and the journals of opinion, they have demonstrated conclusively that they were much more concerned with tape erasures, tax fraud, illegal donations, and other such monumental and unprecedented crimes, which were seen as virtually bringing fascism to the United States. When survivors of the police raid sued the FBI and the Chicago police, the government settled out of court rather than provide a forum for investigation.

A top secret *Special Report* for the president in June 1970²⁰ gives some insight into the motivation for the actions undertaken by the government to destroy the Black Panther party. The report describes the party as “the most active and dangerous black extremist group in the United States.” Its “hard-core members” were estimated at about 800, but “a recent poll indicates that approximately 25 per cent of the black population has a great respect for the BPP, including 43 per cent of blacks under²¹ years of age.” On the basis of such estimates of the potential of the party, the repressive agencies of the state proceeded against it to ensure that it did not succeed

¹⁹ John Kifner, “Security Aide for Indians Says He Was F.B.I. Informer,” *New York Times*, March 13, 1975.

²⁰ *Special Report of Interagency Committee on Intelligence (Ad Hoc)*, Chairman J. Edgar Hoover, along with the directors of the CIA, DIA, and NSA, prepared for the President, June 25, 1970, marked “Top Secret.” A censored version was later released. Quotes below are from Book 7, Part 1: *Summary of Internal Security Threat*.

²¹ Everett R. Holles, “A.C.L.U. Says F.B.I. Funded ‘Army To terrorize Antiwar Protesters,’” *N.Y. Times*, June 27, 1975. Information and quotes given below are from the 18-page single-space report submitted to the Senate Select Committee on June 27, 1975, unless otherwise indicated. See also Steven V. Roberts, “F.B.I. Informer Is Linked to Right-Wing Violence,” *N.Y. Times*, June 24, 1974.

in organizing as a substantial social or political force. We may add that in this case, government repression proved quite successful.

The same *Special Report* develops the broader motivation for the FBI operations. The intelligence analysis explains that “the movement of rebellious youth known as the ‘New Left,’ involving and influencing a substantial number of college students, is having a serious impact on contemporary society with a potential for serious domestic strife.” The New Left has “revolutionary aims” and an “identification with Marxism-Leninism.” It has attempted “to infiltrate and radicalize labor,” and after failing “to subvert and control the mass media” has established “a large network of underground publications which serve the dual purpose of an internal communication network and an external propaganda organ.” Its leaders have “openly stated their sympathy with the international communist revolutionary movements in South Vietnam and Cuba; and have directed others into activities which support these movements.” “Although New Left groups have been responsible for widespread damage to ROTC facilities, for the halting of some weapons-related research, and for the increasing dissent within the military services, the major threat to the internal security of the United States is that directed against the civilian sector of our society.”

A review of events in San Diego, submitted to the Church Committee in June 1975 under the auspices of the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Southern California and released to the press at that time,²² gives further insight into the activities of the FBI during the period we are considering. The report, much of which is based on “public admissions of the officers and agents involved, including sworn testimony at various criminal trials and statements given to new reporters and investigators,” describes how the FBI managed to convert a disbanded right-wing paramilitary organization (Minutemen) into the Secret Army Organization (SAO), placing an FBI informant, Howard Godfrey, in a leadership position. Godfrey was paid \$250 a month plus expenses. “Between 1967 and 1972, Godfrey, using F.B.I. resources, furnished firearms, explosives, other equipment and funds to the Minutemen and SAO,” supplying at least 75% of the SAO’s operating expenses.²³

An SAO cell directed by Godfrey “engaged in repeated acts of violence and terrorism against the left,” all with the knowledge of his FBI superiors. Among these acts were destruction of newspaper offices and book stores, firebombing of cars, distribution of leaflets giving the address of the collective where anti-war activist Peter Bohmer lived “for any of our readers who may care to look up this Red Scum, and say hello,” etc. On January 6, 1972, Godfrey and another SAO member fired two shots into the collective’s house, using a gun that Godfrey had stolen. One of the bullets hit Paula Tharp, a resident of the house and New Left activist. The following day, Godfrey informed his FBI supervisor, Steve Christiansen, and gave him the gun and a jacket worn by the gunman. Christiansen hid the gun in his apartment for six months and destroyed the jacket, concealing the information from the San Diego police, under FBI orders. The story of this and other incidents became public in June 1972 when the SAO was finally broken up by police after

²² Everett R. Holles, “A.C.L.U. Says F.B.I. Funded ‘Army To terrorize Antiwar Protesters,’” *N.Y. Times*, June 27, 1975. Information and quotes given below are from the 18-page single-space report submitted to the Senate Select Committee on June 27, 1975, unless otherwise indicated. See also Steven V. Roberts, “F.B.I. Informer Is Linked to Right-Wing Violence,” *N.Y. Times*, June 24, 1974.

²³ Godfrey “has testified in a California court that the bureau gave him \$10,000 to \$20,000 worth of weapons and explosives for use by the [SAO] in addition to his \$250-a-month salary as an informant.” John M. Crewdson, “Kelley Discounts F.B.I.’s Link to a Terrorist Group,” *N.Y. Times*, January 12, 1976.

the SAO bombed a movie theater where two police officers were present. The FBI succeeded in averting prosecution of Godfrey or any FBI agents, including Christiansen, who was permitted to resign and sent off to Utah, where he reports that “the F.B.I. is taking good care of us.” The FBI then continued with other illegal intelligence and terror programs directed against Bohmer and associates, including several assassination plots. Not one FBI agent or informer has been prosecuted.

As an interesting sidelight, the report states that “in the spring of 1971, according to a [San Diego State] college employee, F.B.I. agents furnished information about Bohmer to college administrative officials and looked through and copied or made notes on his confidential college personnel file.” Bohmer was then an instructor at the college. The college subsequently brought charges against Bohmer, using “information which could only have been furnished by law enforcement agencies.”²⁴ A hearing was held, but before it made its findings, the college president fired Bohmer. The hearing committee ruled in Bohmer’s favor and he was reinstated. The college then arranged a second investigation under the auspices of the American Association of University Professors. Bohmer was cleared again, but the chancellor of the California state college system, Glenn Dumke, declared that he would not permit Bohmer to be rehired and ordered a third hearing, which also cleared Bohmer of any wrongdoing. Dumke rejected the hearing findings and Bohmer was dismissed. This was only one of many political firings during these years.²⁵ It is now commonly alleged that during what is sometimes called “the time of troubles” the universities were terrorized by left-wing totalitarians.²⁶

A careful review of the facts would reveal a rather different story. The record of FBI-organized violence and terror in San Diego was submitted to the Church Committee in June 1975. On January 11, 1976, the *San Diego Union* reported some of this information, leading to denials by FBI Director Clarence Kelley, who, however, “acknowledged today that a leader of an alleged secret paramilitary group set up in California to battle antiwar protesters was a paid F.B.I. informer.”²⁷ On February 2, the San Diego City Council forwarded a resolution to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (Church Committee), “urging its members to come to San Diego to conduct hearings.”²⁸ The city council also ordered an independent local investigation. One city councilman said that he had informed Senate investigators of efforts to restore peace to the black community

²⁴ The report also notes that FBI agents and Cambridge, Mass. police broke into the apartment of George Katsiaficas, “ransacked it and stole his personal diaries and other papers and effects,” according to court testimony at a criminal trial by the Cambridge police officer involved. Katsiaficas and Bohmer were friends in Cambridge and were involved in political activities there. Both went to San Diego. Both were targeted by the SAO and were subsequently plaintiffs in a civil suit supported by the ACLU in San Diego.

²⁵ I have discussed another clear-cut example in *Problems of Knowledge and Freedom* (New York: Pantheon, 1971, p. 72). See also my *Towards a New Cold War* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), chapter 1, note 23. There are many others. To my knowledge, there has been no systematic investigation of this matter. Still more significant is the extraordinary conformism of scholarship; for some discussion, see chapters 1, 2 of *Towards a New Cold War*, particularly 103f.

²⁶ For some examples from the 1970s, see my *Towards a New Cold War*, pp. 214–5).

²⁷ “F.B.I. Chief Tells of Coast Informant,” *N.Y. Times*, January 14, 1976, p. 57. Reporting Kelley’s denials, here and on January 12 (see note 20), the *Times* also cited some of the charges, attributing them to the discoveries of Senate committee investigators, though the information cited was contained in the June 1975 ACLU report and was in fact reported by the *Times* at the time (see note 19).

²⁸ Everett R. Holles, “San Diego Seeking Inquiry into F.B.I.,” *N.Y. Times*, February 8, 1976. Holles also refers to “evidence assembled by the Senate committee’s investigators,” citing information in the June ACLU report that appeared in the *Times* in June, 1975. The *Times* reports in January and February 1976 suggest that a Senate inquiry is in progress but give no evidence that this is so. The February 2 resolution of the San Diego City Council indicates that there has been no serious investigation. To the best of my knowledge, there has been none.

at the time when the FBI was attempting to incite gang warfare there. “We were making progress in our efforts to cool things down, at a time when the F.B.I. was trying to increase the strife and bloodshed,” he said. The national chairman of the US organization, now a professor at San Diego State, said that US and the Panthers had been negotiating to avoid bloodshed: “Then the F.B.I. stepped in and the shooting started.” As we see, the FBI effort to provoke gang warfare among black groups was only a part of a more general program of violence and terror, targeting antiwar activists as well.

In summary, during the decade of the 1960s and for a period of unknown duration since (perhaps still continuing), the FBI extended its earlier clandestine operations against the Communist party, committing its resources to undermining the Puerto Rico independence movement, the Socialist Workers party, the civil rights movement, black nationalist movements, the Ku Klux Klan, segments of the peace movement, the student movement, and the “New Left” in general. The overall allocation of FBI resources during this period is of course unknown. One relevant bit of evidence is provided by the “Media files,” stolen from the Media, Pennsylvania, office of the FBI in March 1971 by a group calling itself “the Citizen’s Commission to Investigate the FBI,” and widely distributed through left and peace movement channels. According to its analysis of the documents in this FBI office, 1 percent were devoted to organized crime, mostly gambling; 30 percent were “manuals, routine forms, and similar procedural matter”; 40 percent were devoted to political surveillance and the like, including two cases involving right-wing groups, ten concerning immigrants, and over 200 on left or liberal groups. Another 14 percent of the documents concerned draft resistance and “leaving the military without government permission.” The remainder concerned bank robberies, murder, rape, and interstate theft.²⁹ Whether these figures are typical or not we cannot know, in the case of a secret terrorist organization such as the FBI. It is clear, however, that the commitment of the FBI to undermine and destroy popular movements that departed from political orthodoxy was extensive, and was apparently proportional to the strength and promise of such movements — as one would expect in the case of the secret police organization of any state, though it is doubtful that there is anything comparable to this record among the Western industrial democracies.

The effectiveness of the state disruption programs is not easy to evaluate. Surely it was not slight. Black leaders estimate the significance of the programs as substantial. Dr. James Turner of Cornell University, president of the African Heritage Studies Association, assesses these programs as having “serious long-term consequences for black Americans,” in that they “had created in blacks a sense of depression and hopelessness.”³⁰ He states that “the F.B.I. set out to break the momentum developed in black communities in the late fifties and early sixties”; “we needed to put together organizational mechanisms to deliver services,” but instead, “our ability to influ-

²⁹ For analysis and texts of the Media documents, see Paul Cowan, Nick Egleson, and Nat Hentoff, *State Secrets* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973). Comparable figures are given by Marx (*op. cit.*). He notes that “among the 34 cases [of infiltration] for which some information is available, 11 involved white campus groups, 11, predominantly white peace groups and/or economic groups; 10, black and Chicano groups; and only two, right-wing groups.” Furthermore, “in two-thirds of the 34 cases considered here, the specious activists appear to have gone beyond passive information gathering to active provocation.” It had been speculated that Cointelpro was terminated (officially at least) after the program was exposed by the Media burglary. This is confirmed in a briefing with the Assistant Director of the FBI in charge of the Intelligence Division. See Pike Committee Report.

³⁰ C. Gerald Fraser, “F.B.I. Action in 1961 Called Still Harmful to Hopes of Blacks,” *New York Times*, April 6, 1974. See also Jesse Jackson and Alvin Poussaint. “The Danger Behind FBI Obstruction of Black Movements,” *Boston Globe*, April 2, 1974.

ence things that happen to us internally and externally was killed.” He concludes that “the lack of confidence and paranoia stimulated among black people by these actions” were just beginning to fade. Conceivably, the long-term impact may be salutary: “We realize that we can’t depend on symbolism and on inspired leadership and we are beginning to build solidly based organizations.” “Symbolism and inspired leadership” are easy targets for the repressive institutions of the state, its propaganda agencies, and cooperative intellectuals. Solidly based organizations may be able to withstand such attacks. The same lesson, of course, must be learned outside the black community.

We note further that the criminal activities of the FBI were initiated under the liberal Democratic administrations and carried further under Nixon. These programs were (partially) exposed during the Watergate period, and though incomparably more serious than anything charged against Nixon, they were virtually ignored during this period by the liberal national press and journals of opinion. I have discovered personally — and others may verify for themselves — that much of the most significant information is unknown to generally well-informed journalists and other intellectuals, and that the scale of the FBI programs is rarely appreciated even today, though by now enough information is readily available for those who choose to know.

We note finally that “the Justice Department has decided not to prosecute anyone in connection with the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s 15-year campaign to disrupt the activities of suspected subversive organizations.”³¹ J. Stanley Pottinger, head of the Civil Rights Division, reported to the attorney general that he had found “no basis for criminal charges against any particular individuals involving particular incidents.” The director of the FBI also made clear that he saw nothing particularly serious in the revelations of the past several years. There is as yet no public record or evidence of any systematic investigation of these practices. As already noted, the liberal press paid little heed to the record that was being exposed during the Watergate period and even since has generally ignored the more serious cases and failed to present anything remotely resembling an accurate picture of the full record and what it implies. In short, the system continues to work.

The criminal programs of the FBI during the 1960s are simply an extension of past practices. As the Pike Committee Report observes, the Socialist Workers Party “has been subjected to 34 years of intensive investigation” (and, we may add, years of harassment and disruption as well), without any evidence whatsoever of any illegal activity.³² According to William C. Sullivan, Hoover’s assistant for many years:

Such a very great man as Franklin D. Roosevelt saw nothing wrong in asking the FBI to investigate those opposing his lend-lease policy — a purely political request. He also had us look into the activities of others who opposed our entrance into World War II, just as later Administrations had the FBI look into those opposing the conflict in Vietnam. It was a political request also when he [Roosevelt] instructed us to put a telephone tap, a microphone, and a physical surveillance on an internationally known leader in his Administration. It was done. The results he wanted were secured

³¹ “Charges Over F.B.I.’s Tactics on Subversive Suspects Barred,” *Washington Star-News*; *New York Times*, January 4, 1975.

³² The committee report notes that the FBI Manual of Instructions allows preliminary investigation of “extremist” groups, but requires that these be terminated in 90 days if there is no indication of criminal violations.

and given to him. Certain records of this kind ... were not then or later put into the regular FBI filing system. Rather, they were deliberately kept out of it.³³

Not long after World War II ended, President Truman put into operation the repressive measures which laid the basis for what is misleadingly called “McCarthyism.” The Mundt-Nixon bill calling for the registration of the Communist party was reported out of Nixon’s House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1948. Senate liberals objected, and after a Truman veto they proposed as a substitute “the ultimate weapon of repression: concentration camps to intern potential troublemakers on the occasion of some loosely defined future ‘Internal Security Emergency’;”³⁴ including, as one case, “insurrection within the United States in aid of a foreign enemy.”³⁵ This substitute was advocated by Benton, Douglas, Graham, Kefauver, Kilgore, Lehman, and Humphrey, then a freshman senator. Humphrey later voted against the bill, though he did not retreat from his concentration camp proposal. In fact, he was concerned that the conference committee had brought back “a weaker bill, not a bill to strike stronger blows at the Communist menace, but weaker blows.” The problem with the new bill was that those interned in the detention centers would have “the right of habeas corpus so they can be released and go on to do their dirty business.”³⁶ In later years as well, Senate liberals were responsible for some of the most repressive legislation. During the same period, the ideological institutions of American society — the mass media, cinema, and the universities and schools — were successfully purified as radicals were largely eliminated from the sensitive professions and often harassed or dismissed elsewhere as well. It was only under the pressure of the student movement in the late 1960s that the universities were compelled to become slightly less orthodox and occasionally to make more than marginal concessions to freedom of thought and inquiry that moved beyond the ideological consensus.

It is now commonly argued that during the late 1960s the universities were virtually taken over by the left, while the mass media took on an adversary position with respect to state authority — some say irresponsibly, while others laud the press for its honesty and independence. This is gross nonsense. The orthodoxy of the universities was barely challenged. Overwhelmingly, university departments, particularly those concerned with domestic policy and international affairs, remained under the control of people committed to the reigning state capitalist ideology, and throughout the Vietnam war the subversion of the universities in the service of state policy persisted with only minor interference. As for the media, I have already pointed out that the Watergate affair — allegedly their finest hour — merely demonstrates their continued subservience to the ruling powers. The same is generally true with regard to the war in Vietnam. Even the liberal press generally continued, to the end, to describe the war as a conflict between North and South Vietnam, hewing close to the official propaganda line. Media doves joined most liberal intellectuals in protesting that the United States was defending South Vietnam in an exercise of misplaced benevolence. The war was “a mistake,” a case of good motives transmuted (mysteriously) into bad policy, with no one to blame. The fact that the United States was engaged

³³ Letter to the annual Chief Justice Earl Warren Conference on Advocacy, June 7–8, 1974, cited from the final report, *Privacy in a Free Society*, by Nat Hentoff, “The Privacy War Games,” *Village Voice*, December 9, 1974.

³⁴ Frank Wilkinson, *The Era of Libertarian Repression – 1948 to 1973: from Congressman to President, with Substantial Support from the Liberal Establishment*, University of Akron, 1974; reprinted from the *University of Akron Law Review*.

³⁵ Emergency Detention Act of 1950, cited by Wilkinson.

³⁶ Cited by Wilkinson from *96 Congressional Record*, 1950, 15520–1.

in direct aggression in South Vietnam, and that its murderous attack against the rural society of South Vietnam then spilled over to neighboring regions, has been consistently suppressed by the media and journals of opinion, again with a few honorable exceptions, though I am unaware of even a single instance in which the media referred to U. S. *aggression* in South Vietnam, clearly the case from 1962, when the U. S. air force began the bombardment of rural South Vietnam, and surely not in question from early 1965. The war in Laos and Cambodia was kept “secret” over long periods through the self-censorship of the press, which then hypocritically blamed Nixon for deception when the time came to punish him for his departure from the established rules of the game. Kissinger’s efforts to evade the provisions of the “peace treaty” were also effectively kept from public attention, in a remarkable display of submissiveness. I have given elaborate documentation elsewhere, and will not discuss this matter further here.³⁷

I have spoken of this system as a post World War II phenomenon, but that is misleading. Its roots go far deeper. Recall that J. Edgar Hoover rose to national prominence when he was appointed chief of the General Intelligence (anti-radical) division of the Justice Department in August 1919, just before the “Palmer raids” of January 2, 1920, when more than 4,000 alleged “radicals” were rounded up in thirty-three cities in twenty-three states (over 200 aliens were subsequently deported), while the *Washington Post* editorialized that “there is no time to waste on hairsplitting over infringement of liberty” in the face of the Bolshevik menace, and lauded the House of Representatives for its expulsion of socialist congressman Victor Berger on grounds that it could not have given a “finer or more impressive demonstration of Americanism”; the *New York Times* meanwhile described the expulsion of socialist assemblymen as “an American vote altogether, a patriotic and conservative vote” which “an immense majority of the American people will approve and sanction,” whatever the benighted electorate may believe.³⁸

One may trace the pattern back much further, to the Alien and Sedition Acts by which “the Federalists sought to suppress political opposition and to stamp out lingering sympathy for the principles of the French Revolution,³⁹ or the judicial murder of four anarchists for “having advocated doctrines” which allegedly lay behind the explosion of a bomb in Chicago’s Haymarket Square after a striker had been killed by police in May 1886.⁴⁰ The Cointelpro documents and

³⁷ See my *For Reasons of State* (New York: Pantheon, 1973, and earlier books. Also *Towards a New Cold War*, chapters 3,4. See also (with E.S. Herman) *Counterrevolutionary Violence: Bloodbaths in Fact and Propaganda* (New York: Warner Modular, 1973), suppressed by order of the parent conglomerate (Warner Brothers) but available in French (*Bains de Sang*, Paris: Seghers/Laf#, 1974) and other European languages. On the corporate suppression of this monograph, see the prefatory note to Chomsky and Herman, *The Political Economy of Human Rights* (Boston: South End Press, 1979). This suppression, which led finally to the decision of the parent conglomerate to put the publisher out of business, received no public mention to my knowledge. It should be noted that there was a fair amount of honest and important work by American foreign correspondents in the field, and occasional instances of accurate and serious review and analysis at the editorial level as well. For an outstanding example, see the review of the war in the special supplement of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* under the direction of Richard Dudman, April 30, 1975. For an extensive review of Indochina war coverage from 1950 through the mid-1980s, see Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

³⁸ On the post World War I “Red Scare” see Murray B. Levin, *Political Hysteria in America: the Democratic Capacity for Repression* (New York: Basic Books, 1972). Other sources have cited figures as high as 10,000 arrested during the Palmer Raids and 700 aliens departed. See Max Lowenthal, *The Federal Bureau of Investigation* (William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1950).

³⁹ David Brion Davis, ed., *The Fear of Conspiracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* A fifth committed suicide before the sentence of death could be executed. Three others were sentenced to hanging as well, but were not executed. No proof was offered that any of the eight had been involved in the bomb-throwing.

the related disclosures are noteworthy, and in accord with historical precedent, in that no specific illegal acts were charged against those targeted by the FBI, though a vague “propensity for violence” and unspecified violent acts are alleged. Similarly, the “seditious utterances” of the Haymarket anarchists sufficed, in the eyes of the Chicago police, to attribute “moral responsibility” for the bombing and to justify their prosecution and hanging.⁴¹ And Attorney General Palmer justified his actions “to clean up the country almost unaided by any virile legislation” on grounds of the failure of Congress “to stamp out these seditious societies in their open defiance of law by various forms of propaganda”:

Upon these two basic certainties, first that the “Reds” were criminal aliens, and secondly that the American Government must prevent crime, it was decided that there could be no nice distinctions drawn between the theoretical ideals of the radicals and their actual violations of our national laws.} Palmer’s “information showed that communism in this country was an organization of thousands of aliens, who were direct allies of Trotzky.” Thus “the Government is now sweeping the nation clean of such alien filth,” with the overwhelming support of the press, until they perceived that their own interests were threatened.⁴²

Elsewhere he described the prisoners as follows:

Out of the sly and crafty eyes of many of them leap cupidity, cruelty, insanity, and crime; from their lopsided faces, sloping brows, and misshapen features may be recognized the unmistakable criminal type.

Palmer was a liberal and progressive. His purpose was “to tear out the radical seeds that have entangled American ideas in their poisonous theories.”⁴³ His belief that the state has the authority to prevent these seeds from germinating is within the general framework of American liberalism. The mass media, the schools, and the universities defend ideological orthodoxy in their own, generally successful, ways. When a threat to reigning dogma is perceived, the state is entitled to act.

After World War I, labor militancy menaced established privilege. Hoover labored to portray the 1919 steel strike as a “Red conspiracy.” A subsequent miner’s strike was described by President Wilson as “one of the gravest steps ever proposed in this country,” “a grave moral and legal wrong,” while the press warned that the miners, “red-soaked in the doctrines of Bolshevism,” were “starting a general revolution in America.”⁴⁴ The Red Scare, as Levin shows, “was promoted, in large part, by major business groups which feared their power was threatened by a leftward trend in the labor movement”; and they had “reason to rejoice” at its substantial success, namely, “to weaken and conservatize the labor movement, to dismantle radical parties, and to intimidate liberals.” It “was an attempt — largely successful — to reaffirm the legitimacy of the power elites of capitalism and to further weaken workers’ class consciousness.” The Red Scare was strongly

⁴¹ See the excerpt from Michael J. Schaack, *Anarchy and Anarchists*, Chicago, 1889, in Davis’s collection. Schaack was captain of the East Chicago Avenue Police Station and “was widely credited with having uncovered the anarchist conspiracy” (Davis).

⁴² See excerpts from Palmer in Davis, *op. cit.* On the role of the press, see Levin, *op. cit.*

⁴³ See excerpt in Davis, *op.cit.*

⁴⁴ Cf. Levin, *op. cit.*

backed by the press and the American elites until they came to see that their own interests would be harmed as the right-wing frenzy got out of hand—in particular, the anti-immigrant hysteria, which threatened the best reserve of cheap labor.

The Red Scare also served to buttress an interventionist foreign policy. Foster Rhea Dulles observed that “governmental agencies made most of these fears and kept up a barrage of anti-Bolshevik propaganda throughout 1919 which was at least partially inspired by the need to justify the policy of intervention in both Archangel and Siberia.”⁴⁵

After World War II, the story was reenacted. While intellectual ideologists depicted American expansionism as “defense of freedom” (with an occasional, but so understandable excess of zeal), transmuted the brutal Russian state into a global aggressor under an elaborate mythology that even its creators have been compelled to disown,⁴⁶ the state moved to ensure obedience and submissiveness to the evolving imperial system and the domestic permanent war economy. As already noted, American liberals had their hand in some of the worst abuses. The general motivation was the traditional one: “there could be no nice distinctions drawn between the theoretical ideals of the radicals and their actual violations of our national laws” (Palmer).

The basic liberal doctrine was laid out clearly by Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson in his opinion upholding the Smith Act on grounds “that it was no violation of free speech to convict Communists for conspiring to teach or advocate the forcible overthrow of the government, even if no clear and present danger could be proved.” For if the clear and present danger test were applied, Jackson argued, “it means that Communist plotting is protected during its period of incubation; its preliminary stages of organization and preparation are immune from the law, the Government can move only after imminent action is manifest, when it would, of course, be too late.” Thus there must be “some legal formula that will secure an existing order against revolutionary radicalism.... There is no constitutional right to ‘gang up’ on the Government.” Opposition tendencies, however minuscule, must be nipped in the bud prior to “imminent action.” As for the Communist party, “ordinary conspiracy principles” suffice to charge any individual associated with it “with responsibility for and participation in all that makes up the Party’s program” and “even an individual,” acting alone and apart from any “conspiracy,” “cannot claim that the Constitution protects him in advocating or teaching overthrow of government by force or violence.”⁴⁷

In conformity with these doctrines, the ideological institutions must be kept free of contamination. Even a single tenured Marxist professor of economics in a country as complex and diverse as the United States was regarded as constituting a potential threat. As in the case of the Red Scare of 1920, it was only when the hysteria that had been whipped up began to endanger major

⁴⁵ Foster Rhea Dulles, *The Road to Teheran* (Princeton: Princeton U. press, 1945), cited by Levin, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ In his Bancroft Prize-winning study of the Cold War, John Lewis Gaddis points out that “historians, revisionist and nonrevisionist, now generally agree on the limited nature of Stalin’s objectives,” citing a number of examples. Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War: 1941–1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), p. 355, note 2. A more accurate statement would be that after the revisionist challenge to orthodoxy, these elements of the revisionist critique were quietly absorbed by mainstream scholarship, abandoning earlier pretense, while the “revisionists” were regularly denounced, often on the basis of gross misrepresentation and absurd argument, of which Gaddis provides some examples, with his criticism of the “economic determinism” of those who noted that foreign policy was, naturally enough, heavily influenced by the interests of forces in the domestic society that had the power to make this influence felt. See *Towards a New Cold War*, chapter 7, note 15, for other examples. For discussion of this phenomenon, see Christopher Lasch’s introduction to Gar Alperovitz, *Cold War Essays* (Anchor, 1970).

⁴⁷ See the concurring and dissenting opinions of Mr. Justice Jackson cited in Davis, *op. cit.*

institutions and individuals near the center of power that the economic and political leadership and their intellectual spokesmen took effective measures to terminate the repression — or more accurately, to restrict it to the proper victims.

Given the historical context, it is entirely natural that the beginnings of protest and organization in the early 1960s set the apparatus of repression into operation once again, in the manner described above and elsewhere.⁴⁸ Nor is it surprising that American liberalism looked the other way, until the repression struck home under Nixon; and even then, it is important to emphasize once again, indignation was largely restricted to Nixon's crimes, insignificant in comparison to the revelations of the same period. Matters are no different when the black anarchist Martin Sostre—designated as a “prisoner of conscience” by Amnesty International—was mercilessly persecuted by the state for many years, or when black students were murdered at Orangeburg and Jackson State, and on and on.

Some commentators have found it “puzzling” that the FBI should devote such energies to such actions as hounding a scoutmaster in Orange, New Jersey, whose wife is a socialist, or disrupting small socialist parties, while “crime rates in American cities escalated and organized crime expanded its interests” and “the real espionage dangers from the Soviet K.G.B.” were “apparently ignored.”⁴⁹ Placing the events in their historical and doctrinal context, the puzzle is easily resolved. The real threat to the “existing order” was not organized crime or the KGB, but “revolutionary radicalism” or even protest by popular groups that have escaped the control of the political leadership and intellectual ideologists. That this threat can quickly become real indeed was made evident in the later 1960s, when American aggression in Vietnam was significantly hampered⁵⁰ and its ideological props swept away (in significant circles, though not in the major ideological institutions).

For the most part, however, the threat of intellectual independence and uncontrolled political and social organization has been well contained (the major postwar success of the “containment policy”). Alone among the parliamentary democracies, the United States has had no mass-based socialist party, however mild and reformist, no socialist voice in the media, and virtually no departure from interventionist militarized state capitalist ideology within the schools and universities, at least until the pressure of student activism impelled a slight departure from orthodoxy. All of this is testimony to the effectiveness of the system of controls that has been in force for many years, the activities of the FBI being only the spearhead for far more extensive, substantial, and effective — if more low-keyed — measures enforced throughout American society.

From its inception, the FBI has operated on the liberal doctrine that “preliminary stages of organization and preparation” must be frustrated, well before there is any clear and present danger of “revolutionary radicalism,” occasionally progressing beyond the intended bounds of this

⁴⁸ See, among others, N. Blackstock, ed., *COINTELPRO* (New York: Vintage, 1976), for which this chapter was originally the introduction; Frank J. Donner, *The Age of Surveillance: The Aims and Methods of America's Political Intelligence System* (New York: Knopf, 1980); Robert J. Goldstein, *Political Repression in Modern America*, (Cambridge: Schenkman, 1978); Morton H. Halperin et. al., *The Lawless State* (New York: Penguin, 1976); Christy Macy and Susan Kaplan, eds., *Documents* (New York: Penguin, 1980); Ward Churchill and John Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression* (Boston: South End, 1988); Kenneth O'Reilly, *Racial Matters* (New York: Free Press, 1989); Churchill and Vander Wall, *COINTELPRO Papers* (Boston: South End, 1990); Donner, *Protectors of Privilege* (U. of California, 1990).

⁴⁹ Nicholas M. Horrock, “The F.B.I.'s Appetite for Very Small Potatoes,” *New York Times*, March 23, 1975.

⁵⁰ On the significance of the threat, both actual and potential, as perceived at high levels of policy planning, see my review of some of the evidence contained in the “Pentagon Papers” in *For Reasons of State*, Chapter 1. For discussion of the impact on the American expeditionary force, see David Cortright, *Soldiers in Revolt*, Doubleday, 1975).

doctrine. The people of the United States pay dearly for domestic privilege and the securing of imperial domains. The vast waste of social wealth, miserable urban ghettos, meaningless work within authoritarian capitalist institutions, the threat (or reality) of loss of even the opportunity to rent oneself to the owners of capital, standards of health and social welfare that should be intolerable in a society with vast productive resources — all of this must be endured and even welcomed as “the price of freedom” if the existing order is to stand without challenge. The intelligentsia have generally played their natural role, promulgating the required doctrines with enthusiasm and energy and diverting or diluting any serious departure from the conventional system of beliefs, with an occasional show of dismay when privileged groups themselves are threatened. As for the state instruments of repression, one can expect little change in coming years, at least until the rise of mass-based popular organizations devoted to social change and to an end of oppression and injustice.

This chapter is a revised version of the introduction to Nelson Blackstock, *COINTELPRO* (New York: Vintage, 1976), with some further material added in 1980, and reworked again in 1999.

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