

# INFORMERS THE ENEMY WITHIN

**N**obody has yet invoked the name of Franklin D. Roosevelt as the patron saint of the Watergate operation. Yet FDR, in 1940, authorized Robert Jackson, his attorney general at the time, to institute surveillance procedures as illegal and unconstitutional as those used by the Watergate conspirators.

From Roosevelt to Truman to Eisenhower to Kennedy to Johnson to Nixon—every President and every President's staff has carried out illegal and unconstitutional acts. It is essential to understand that fact lest the true dimensions of the Watergate conspiracy be lost in gloating over the welter of charges and countercharges about the stupid attempts of Nixon and his staff to cover up what they ordered done.

Roosevelt's rationalization for ordering procedures expressly prohibited by law was the "defense of this nation" from the Nazi threat. During the Truman Administration, fear of Communist subversion was the warrant for the continued use of wiretaps, bugging and the planting of informers inside dissident political groups. Herbert Brownell, Eisenhower's attorney general, approved the use of microphone surveillance, with trespass if necessary, because "considerations of national security and the national safety are paramount."

Similar motivations moved John F. Kennedy to continue along the same course. Indeed, Robert Kennedy, then attorney general, was a wiretapping enthusiast; Archibald Cox, Kennedy's solicitor general, who now heads the Watergate prosecution, also supported the legalization of wiretapping.

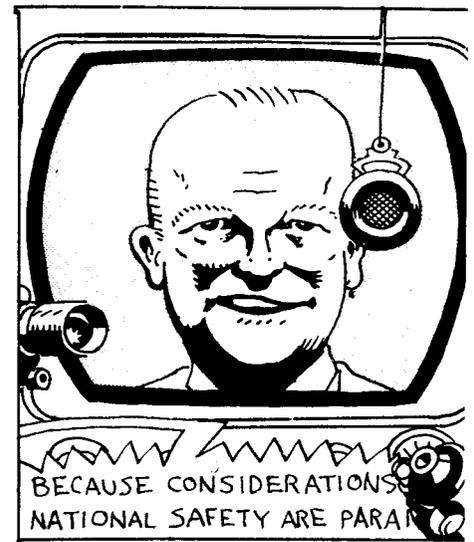
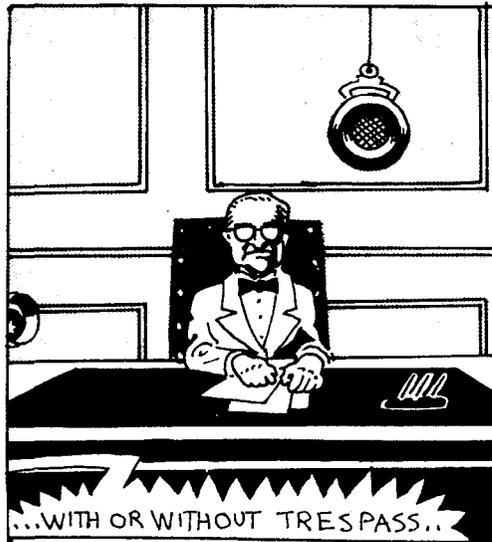
And Robert Kennedy's war on crime, personified in his relentless pursuit of Jimmy Hoffa, incorporated continuous violations of Hoffa's civil liberties by the "Get Hoffa" squad in the Justice Department. Robert Kennedy was convinced, genuinely, that Hoffa headed a "conspiracy of evil" directed against the U.S.; it followed, therefore, that Hoffa had to be fought with every weapon, including planting an informer with a long criminal record inside the Hoffa entourage during Hoffa's trial on a jury tampering charge. The informer was released from prison on condition that he supply the government with advance information on Hoffa's defense plans; the U.S. prosecutor in the case, who used the informer's advance information to help convict Hoffa, was James F. Neal, selected by Cox to head up the information gathering operation in the forthcoming Watergate prosecution.

Lyndon Johnson's administration applied the same techniques, too, although when Ramsey Clark was attorney general he cut down the number of illegal telephonic surveillances. But the large-scale infiltration of radical, black militant, student and anti-war groups by informers carried on during the LBJ period was justified within the Administration because of a fear that "national security" was being menaced by race riots, violent demonstrations and social upheavals.

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**By Paul Jacobs**



It is natural, then, that within such a national atmosphere of fear, suspicion and distrust, often generated by the government itself, the Nixon Administration would also be fearful, suspicious and distrustful of its enemies, including those individuals and groups in the Democratic Party who had denounced Nixon so vigorously over the years. Or, at least, even if the leaders of the Nixon Administration were totally cynical about their real political objectives, the political milieu of the country was sufficiently paranoid that men like James McCord and Bernard Barker suffered no doubts when they were told to burglarize and bug the Democratic Party offices because the Party might be harboring disloyal elements. Would anyone be surprised to discover that John F. Kennedy had been assassinated because the anti-Castro forces were convinced that JFK and the Democratic Party had betrayed the cause of "freedom," deliberately, by reneging on the support that had been promised for the Bay of Pigs invasion?

If McCord and Barker seem genuinely bewildered by what has happened to them after being caught at the Watergate, they have a right to be confused. After all, McCord's work as a CIA security specialist—a euphemism for an expert on wiretapping—was not only sanctioned by the U.S. Government, but applauded by it: the former CIA agent received medals and commendations for carrying out precisely the same kind of activities that have now put him in jail. And Barker was a Bay of Pigs "hero," willing to risk his life at the command of his chief.

Both of them and their fellow conspirators have been trapped by the contradictions of an internal value system produced through their participation in what has been, until now, an institutionalized and accepted, even though reasonably secret, system of large-scale governmental political espionage.

That system depends on the willingness of the subordinates in it to suspend judgment, to abdicate all responsibility to their superiors, to follow orders without question. Once the system socializes its individual, human components, it takes on a life of its own; its success or failure

depends not on who makes the decision that an illegal act must be committed, but on whether the assignments are carried out properly, i.e., without those who do the job being caught or exposed.

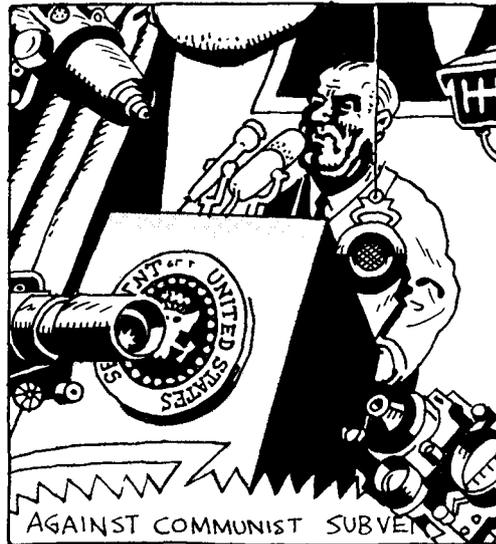
The system also depends on the use of modern technology, which had produced wondrous, miniaturized electronic devices for unauthorized eavesdropping like those used in Watergate. But the system depends even more on the use of informers, the most ancient method both governments and private organizations use to procure information about dissident individuals and groups.

Curiously, although radicals have always been sensitive to the notion that informers exist and often paranoid about the dangers they present, the reality of the informers' role is largely ignored, even when the informers act as provocateurs.

I remember my own incredulous reaction when, in the 1950s, I accidentally had momentary access to a report filed by an informer about the League For A Revolutionary Workers Party, a Trotskyist splinter group of the '30s, to which I belonged along with maybe a dozen other members of the faith. The League's tiny membership (the length and sonority of such grouplets' names were always in inverse proportion to their size and importance) was capable of doing no more than meeting in a succession of dreary lower East Side lofts to conduct endless Talmudistic discussions on the Stalinist betrayal of the world revolution and the failure of the larger Trotskyist organizations to understand the true nature of Stalinism or even Trotskyism.

Yet our group, and presumably other formations of equally loony Marxist-Leninists, had been infiltrated by an informer whose weekly reports to the government warned that the LRWP was capable of overthrowing the government and seizing power at practically any moment!

We should have been so lucky, for we had a hard time even putting out a monthly mimeographed bulletin. Could our informer have believed the nonsense I saw in the reports? If so, the informer was mad. Or perhaps the informer wanted money and the only way the government could be



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persuaded to maintain "Operation LRWP" was to build up a convincing case that we were indeed very dangerous. Maybe, too, the informer was getting jollies from the work, convinced that, if caught, the organization would take drastic action by inflicting punishment—the worst we could have done was to force the informer to read and report back on our critique of the Fourth International for its mistaken position on the internal crisis within the Ceylonese Socialist Party.

But some place in a musty government file, the names of every LRWP member are listed as having been members of a dangerous radical group. And the situation is much worse now than in the Thirties:

[LEGIONS OF INFORMERS]

It is impossible to make an accurate count of how many political informers, like the one who sat through those awful LRWP meetings, are operating in the country today. But the number must run into the thousands. At least 20 federal agencies, including the CIA, have been using such informers for many years. For long periods of time, the FBI established a minimum quota of four or five informants for each agent assigned to investigate racial groups. And in addition to the 20 federal agencies, military intelligence units have operated their own independent surveillance operations, also employing informers.

Many of the state police forces are likewise involved in political espionage and every large city police force has an intelligence unit which sends its informers into suspect political organizations.

Today's widespread system of political surveillance and investigation of groups and individuals is based on an attitude, pervasive in law enforcement circles, which perceives the civil rights struggle, the anti-war efforts, the student and ecology movements and the militant minority groups as integral parts of an interlocking and overlapping conspiracy against law and order. The FBI's justification for sending

informers into a conference of the well-known pacifist War Resisters League is characteristic of the conspiracy view: the informers were instructed to determine "whether or not there are any indications" that the conference would "generate any anti-U.S. propaganda."

Who are the informers, these shadowy figures who live in a world of code name phone calls and mysterious meetings in parks and hotel rooms? How are they recruited? What motivates them into taking on such assignments? Two high-ranking police officials offer an answer of sorts in *The Informer in Law Enforcement*, the most authoritative police manual on the subject. "We take our informers where we get them," they write. "Many of them are unsavory characters . . ." motivated by "fear," "revenge," "perverse, egotistical and mercenary motives," plus "repentance or desire to reform." And "demented, eccentric or nuisance type" individuals may also attempt to supply the police with information. Then complex psychological motives, money, or what police officers refer to as the "fear motive" provide other incentives for people to become informers.

The "fear motive" provides the police a simple and direct means of building up a pool of informers from among people who have been arrested for crimes: the police suggest that the arrested persons cooperate with them in exchange for, as the manual describes it, "a recommendation for a lesser sentence, a more favorable consideration for parole or probation, the acceptance of a plea to a lesser count in the indictment or through some other favorable action. . . ." Put less delicately, the arrested person is allowed to go free or cop a plea in exchange for becoming an informer against others.

Charles Grimm, whom I met when I was producing a television program about FBI informers and provocateurs, was a prototype model for this type of informer. Grimm, a short, stocky young man, comes from a middle-class, white, Marine Corps family. He grew up in San Diego and received an athletic scholarship to the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. There he'd drifted into the drug scene, finally getting arrested by Tuscaloosa police officers, along with his

# **“With me, there was no conscience, nothing involved. It was a job. I never lost one night’s sleep over it.”**

girlfriend, who got busted for siphoning gas from a car.

“This one detective who was working narcotics in Tuscaloosa for the Tuscaloosa Police Department threatened me,” Grimm said as we sat in the grass at Golden Gate Park, waiting for the film crew to get set up for the television interview. “He said ‘I’m going to throw you in jail, you and your fiancée, if you don’t cooperate with us.’”

“Being afraid of jail as I am,” Grimm continued, “I decided I’d better cooperate. I was supposed to bust people for dope and, of course, I had known people that had done it and so I went around and I talked to these people and eventually six of them did get busted.

“The police had me by the throat and they knew it and eventually the FBI came in and said, ‘Listen, we want you to work for us, too,’ and they also offered to pay me; but it wasn’t the money so much, it was the fact that if I didn’t do it they would nail me anyway.”

The FBI wasn’t interested in employing Grimm as a narcotics informer; he says they wanted “to know what was going on on campus, who the radicals were, to identify certain people from pictures because they had undercover agents walking around the campus and they were taking pictures of everybody and they wanted to know who these people were so they could label them and put them in a file and eventually bust them.”

Charlie Grimm’s fear of going to jail is understandable as the motivating factor which pushed him into becoming an informer and then a provocateur. The desire for money provides another strong impetus to accepting the informer’s role. Louis Tackwood, a Los Angeles ghetto hustler and car thief, became a political informer for the Los Angeles Police Department primarily for the money.

The fast-talking, glib Tackwood insisted, when I interviewed him, that informing was a good job, giving those who work at it plenty of leisure time and reasonably high wages. And Tackwood jeered at the notion, expressed by Grimm, that informers suffer any qualms about betraying those who trust them.

“With me, there was no conscience, nothing involved. It

was a job, J-O-B. I never lost one night’s sleep over it.

“I never worried about getting caught. It was the idea of the money, the free crime. Here’s a cat, a person, me, who like has been successful in forming several organizations for crime. Here are the police officers telling me, hey, we want you to work for us—two things went through my mind then—money and I got a free hand to do anything I want to do.”

Money for informers is plentiful, disbursed on a “cash only” basis. In the FBI, for example, an agent wishing to pay an informer puts in a requisition from a special account, receives a check made out to the agent, cashes the check at a bank and then gives the cash to the informer, getting a receipt for it.

The amounts informers are paid vary greatly, ranging from small disbursements—five or ten dollars—up to three or four hundred dollars, depending upon how good a source of information the informer has been in the past or the amount of risk involved in getting the information and its significance. In the FBI the top payment for a single informing job is normally \$300 in criminal cases and \$400 for political informers. Occasionally, however, that rate is exceeded: Boyd Douglas was paid nearly \$10,000 by the FBI for his work as an informer on Father Philip Berrigan.

And Robert Wall, an ex-FBI agent, reports that when Stokely Carmichael, then under FBI surveillance, came to live in a Washington, D.C. apartment, Wall’s supervisor told him, “We’ve got to get Carmichael and we’ve got to put somebody in his hip pocket. Get an informant in there with him and money is no object. Offer them anything, promise them anything and we’ll try to help you out if you can manage to do it.” Wall did succeed in planting a woman informer inside the Carmichael household at a rather large cost to the government.

Such flexibility in money matters is essential for any agency using informers. Tackwood claims to have earned between eight and ten thousand dollars a year, on a piece work basis, with the amount of pay he got depending upon

*(Continued on page 52)*

The Gainesville Eight:

# DIRTY TRICKS ON TRIAL



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF VVAW

This month, the Senate Watergate hearings will come of interest to a television audience which so far had rather watch soap operas. As the committee's emphasis shifts away from the Washington burglary—already hopelessly old news—it will begin to examine for the first time a monumental, nationwide conspiracy, the most sordid political scandal in American history. In the course of the investigation, the Watergate affair will emerge as a shoddy national *ménage* of cheap-shot politics and outright crime stretching from the California origins of men like Haldeman and Ehrlichman to the dirty tricks of baby-faced Donald Segretti. Much of the emphasis will fasten, of all places, on the quiet university town of Gainesville, Florida. It is there that the Justice Department is prosecuting seven Vietnam Veterans Against the War and one VVAW sympathizer, in a court action which began as the ordeal of the Gainesville Eight—and seems likely to end as the last inept assault in the Nixon Administration's war against dissent in America.

The government's case against the Gainesville Eight is being prosecuted by Guy Goodwin, fittingly enough one of the last surviving field generals of the Administration's pre-Watergate campaign to wipe out dissent and dissenters. As chief of special litigation for the Justice Department's Internal Security Division, Goodwin was the prosecutor who presented evidence to the grand jury that indicted Fr. Philip Berrigan and six others for the earlier "conspiracy" at Har-

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risburg. Undaunted by his failure in Pennsylvania, Goodwin has now indicted the Gainesville defendants.

In the beginning, the case seemed simple enough. A grand jury listened behind closed doors as witnesses supervised by Goodwin recited the atrocities that were to occur during the President's renomination. Then on July 13, 1972—the last day of the Democratic National Convention in Miami Beach—the grand jury indicted six leading figures of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

The VVAW leaders were accused of plotting to "organize numerous fire teams to attack with automatic weapons fire and incendiary devices police stations, police cars, and stores in Miami Beach, Florida, on various dates between Aug. 21 and 24, 1972," the dates during which the Republican Convention was scheduled. The indictment further charged that "the individual co-conspirators would fire lead weights, fried marbles, ball bearings, cherry bombs and smoke bombs at police in Miami Beach . . . by means of wrist rocket slingshots and cross bows . . . [and] would disrupt communications in Miami Beach."

The conspiracy was supposed to have been put together at a regional VVAW meeting in May 1972, at the Gainesville apartment of Scott Camil, a University of Florida student and the VVAW state coordinator. Camil was one of those indicted, and the government made no secret about contending he was the leader of the alleged plot.

From the beginning, the VVAW protested that the prosecution was political, that they were being scapegoated

by Rob Elder