

BOOK REVIEW

COINTELPRO

The FBI's Secret War on Political Freedom

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Using taxpayer's money, large numbers of federal official have been—and still are—working overtime in an attempt to disrupt, confuse, and thwart the black, labor, and socialist movements from achieving their goals of eliminating oppression and exploitation.

That is the only conclusion to be drawn from reading the book *Cointelpro: The FBI's Secret War on Political Freedom*.

The book is distributed by Pathfinder Press and has an introduction by civil libertarian and Massachusetts Institute of Technology Professor Noam Chomsky. It is edited by Cathy Perkus of the Political Rights Defense Fund and contains essays based on research and interviews with victims of government disruption that were first printed in the socialist newspaper *The Militant*.

The Political Rights Defense Fund is a non-partisan civil liberties group that is coordinating a far-reaching legal suit by the Socialist Workers Party and Young Socialist Alliance to halt illegal government surveillance and disruption of black, labor, and socialist groups.

“The story of Cointelpro is slowly emerging,” Perkus writes in her preface. “In the process, proof accumulates that Cointelpro continues to this day—despite assurances by top government officials that the programs known as Cointelpro were formally ended in April 1971.”

Because of the socialists' suit, some 4,000 pages of secret FBI files on its disruption program were brought to the public's attention this year. These files illustrate that a deep fear of government rulers and their agencies is the spread of socialist ideas.

The released files, which are just a small number compared to those still kept hidden, also outline the extent of the illegal means that the government uses to prevent socialist ideas from gaining influence.

Socialists have been harassed and publicly embarrassed. They have been fired from their jobs, and their election campaigns have been subverted.

The FBI disrupted and tried to derail black, labor, and antiwar organizations that socialists joined, by spreading fears of a “red take-over.”

“SWP influence on the followers of Malcolm X would be disrupted by emphasizing the atheism of the SWP as opposed to the basic religious orientation of the MMI [Muslim Mosque Inc.],” one secret Cointelpro file suggested in an attempt to disrupt relations between the two groups after Malcolm's

death. The letter was from the New York bureau of the FBI and was addressed to the Washington headquarters.

Washington approved the program, and later New York wrote back: “It is believed probable that the disintegrating relations between the SWP and [Malcolm’s organization] can be attributed to the disruptive tactic authorized...and will result in a continued loss of influence by the SWP among this group of Negroes.”

In 1964 the FBI tried to sabotage defense of Robert F. Williams and civil rights workers in North Carolina by spreading the false story that a leader of the SWP had stolen defense committee funds. The FBI even composed a poem that it tried to get printed in various newspapers to slander the socialist leader: “Georgie-Porgie, down in Monroe, Found himself alone with the dough, Called the cops, and what did he say? ‘Bad guys came and took it away.’ ”

In his introduction Chomsky writes: “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.”

Chomsky explains that the government’s and FBI’s disruption program has been a bipartisan effort. He calls it an “extensive program of terror, disruption, intimidation, and instigation of violence, initiated under the most liberal Democratic administrations and carried further under Nixon.”

Democrats and Republicans, the book states clearly, have both conspired to deprive blacks, union and antiwar activists, and socialists of their basic rights to dissent and popularize their beliefs.

Another point the book makes clearly: This bipartisan campaign is far from over and the fight to stop it continues.