

America's Political Police, Their Irregular Forces, and the War on Dissent

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I've seen way too many discussions of shenanigans by the FBI in the 1960s and '70s. Whether they intend to or not, the authors of these articles are implying that these tactics are old relics of a by-gone era. Which is certainly not true.

While methods and tactics used in the quashing of dissent may have evolved over time, much of the core principles remain unchanged. The nation's intelligence and federal law enforcement agencies continue to be the executive office's primary tool to discourage opposition to its policies through intimidation and legal harassment. From its beginning as the Treasury Department's Bureau of Investigation until the present, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has been directed by Presidents from Woodrow Wilson to Donald Trump to spy on peace activists, anti-war organizations, environmentalists, labor unions, and anyone else who might get in the way of US foreign and domestic policies, and interfere with corporate activity and earnings.

Since before it's formal inception, the FBI has served as the US government's political police and have engaged in campaigns of low-intensity, counter-insurgent warfare against dissidents, often with the help of irregular forces – even operatives of foreign governments – and the backing of civilian financiers and their front organizations.

In addition, the FBI maintains a network of informants. Senate investigatory committees have previously found the number of paid informants had gone from roughly 1,500 in 1975, to 2,800 in 1980, to over 6,000 in 1986. A budget request presented in 2008 asked for \$12.7 million to fund it's informant network.

Today, years into an era of eroded civil and human rights in the name of a “war on terrorism,” it is even easier for the FBI and their allies in localized law enforcement to entrap unwitting citizens in fantasy plots they concoct, and convince juries that they have foiled a terrorist action. Unlike the 1970s, when many people understood that the government and police were not on their side, many people now seem to be incapable of seeing through such entrapment schemes, and it is only judges who challenge their narrative. But only if they choose to. Many judges are, of course, just there to send people to prison, for any or no reason. Especially people who are not white.

The American Protective League

When the US entered World War 1, concerned citizens were afraid the government was not up to the task of ferreting out German spies and sympathizers, hidden everywhere in the civilian population. In order to assist the government, numerous vigilante groups were financed by the likes of Henry Fricke, Henry Morgan, J. D. Rockefeller, and numerous others who were certain to earn fortunes off the war effort.

Under numerous front organizations like the National Security League, the American Defense Society, and National Civic Federation, they produced fliers and posters promoting “100 percent Americanism.” Their recruits would publicly shame anyone who spoke out against the war, and often beat them, with no interference from the police. They would often confront people in the streets and force them to sign “Loyalty Oaths.”

A group of war profiteers from Chicago foresaw America's forthcoming involvement in the conflict and started the American Protective League, which quickly absorbed similar groups around the country and grew at such a rate that just months after the US entered the war, they were able to provide 250,000 people to the BoI and US Department of War's intelligence forces.

Their operatives opened people's mail and illegally entered their homes to search for subversive literature and contraband. Many carried badges identifying themselves as "Secret Agents."

In order to enforce compliance with draft registration laws, they would round up every male of age in entire neighborhoods and cities, then require them to provide proof of registration before releasing them. Often, family or friends would have to retrieve the documents, and men were held for days until such proof arrived.

In just one such roundup, 150,000 men were questioned in Chicago. They were taken from factories, public transit stations, public parks, saloons, baseball games, stores, and dragged out of vehicles. 20,000 were detained, pending proof of compliance. 1,400 were subsequently conscripted and released, while an unknown number went missing. Perhaps a few thousand. Over 10,000 German-Americans were detained during the war, as suspected traitors.

According to one APL spokesperson, Edward Hough, "It was *fear* that held our enemy population down. *Fear* and nothing else. It was the league's silent and mysterious errand to pile up good reason for that fear" (emphasis from original quote).

Although their stated purpose was to enforce conscription laws and discover German sympathizers and spies, much of the APL's activities centered around anarchists and syndicalists. The Espionage Act of April, 1917 criminalized "treason, insurrection, or forcible resistance to any law of the U.S., or the obstruction of recruiting or enlistment."

The federal statutes carried penalties of up to \$10,000 and 20 years in prison. By 1921, 35 states had passed "Criminal Anarchy" laws, defined as "the doctrine that organized government be overthrown by force or violence, or by assassination, or by unlawful means."

Over 25,000 agents of the APL kept files on anarchists and their activities, much of it obtained by opening mail and breaking into organizer's, agitators, publisher's and activist's homes. To further intimidate dissidents, they would maintain obvious, heavy-handed surveillance on their targets, and interrogate anyone who approached or spoke with the targeted individual. They would visit their targets at their workplaces, which could lead to people losing their jobs.

Stop me if you've heard this before...

*Our Nation is undergoing an era of disruption and violence caused to a large extent by various individuals generally connected with the New Left. Some of these activists urge revolution in America and call for the defeat of the United States in Vietnam. They continually and falsely allege police brutality and do not hesitate to utilize unlawful acts to further their so-called causes. The New Left has on many occasions viciously and scurrilously attacked the Director and the Bureau in an attempt to hamper our investigation of it and to drive us off the college campuses. With this in mind, it is our recommendation that a new Counterintelligence Program be designed to neutralize the New Left and the Key Activists. **"Subject: Counterintelligence Program Internal Security Disruption of the New Left."** FBI memo, May 9, 1968.*

The US government was at war with Black nationalists, human rights groups, and churches in the 1960s. Just the suppression of the Black Panther Party resulted in over 2,500 deaths and more than 12,000 prison sentences. Some of these Panthers are still in prison.

In just three years – 1973-76 – the FBI and its allied henchmen were involved in the deaths of at least 70 Native American activists, and violent attacks against another 300 in the Pine Ridge and Rosebud communities.

In 1979, a “Death to the Klan” rally by the Communist Worker’s Party in Greensboro, NC, was attacked by Klansmen and members of the American Nazi Party. The attackers had been encouraged by FBI and Greensboro police infiltrators. They brought guns to the CWP event, fired on the attendees, killed 5 protesters, injured another 10, and a bystander.

I won’t go into detail about the role of “secret agents” and the FBI from the ’30s through the 70s. That ground has been well-covered over the years. I hope the above examples are enough to convince you of what the government is capable of doing, when it has a mandate from the Executive Office. Instead of retelling of these familiar shenanigans, I want to jump ahead to the 1980s, under the administration of Ronald Reagan.

“I have seen countless people hurt, jailed, even killed. What you’re up against when you take on the FBI, the CIA, the undercover informants who feed the governmental apparatus, is a self-selected group of people who have a messianic vision of themselves.”
Chip Berlet, a political researcher who was involved in cases involving the FBI and the Chicago police in the 1980s.

Reagan was an old, hard-line anti-communist and shitty actor. As President and leader of the “Free” world, this Cold Warrior saw the Communist Menace lurking everywhere. When he intensified counter-insurgency efforts around the world, while cutting domestic spending and federal regulations at home, intense opposition arose in the population. This was, of course, all the proof the senile president – in the early stages of Alzheimer’s Disease – needed that Communists were hiding around every corner, spewing anti-American sentiment to a gullible public.

As it had in the earlier parts of the century, the FBI carried out a campaign of intimidation, harassment, and disruption against anyone in opposition to any policy put forth by the Reagan administration.

Reagan’s resolve to crush any who opposed him was displayed when he fired over 11,000 members of the Air Traffic Controllers Union, who were on strike for shorter hours and better working conditions. The demented President gave the strikers until sundown to get out of town...excuse me...gave them 2 days to return to work, and when they refused, he fired them *en masse*. This was just his first action against dissidents. He later unleashed the FBI to go after his political opponents, even going so far as to investigate elected officials who traveled abroad – including those who visited NATO allied countries.

Just as it had during the WW1 era, the FBI visited the homes and workplaces of anti-war, peace and justice, anti-apartheid, and solidarity activists to confront them with accusations of treason and subversion. Their employers were informed of their political activities. Their friends, lovers, relatives, and neighbors were questioned, and sometimes recruited to report on the activists actions.

This heightened state of repression was intensified after a bomb went off in the US capitol building on November 7, 1983. Although the FBI knew who did the bombing, and why, it used the attack as justification of expanded activity, especially in co-ordinating with the CIA, State Department, and Department of Defense. Which, basically meant the US government was at war with its own citizens.

Again, civic organizations like the World Anti-Communist League, and various factions of the Ku Klux Klan and other White Supremacist groups were given material support and encouragement to intimidate, harass, and physically assault dissidents. Foreign agents of countries experiencing insurgencies at home were given free reign to spy on American activists, and attack people from their homelands who had come to the US to seek refuge. Hundreds of refugees from Central America were deported, and many of them ended up disappeared, dead, or imprisoned. Terrorist attacks against Cubans friendly to Castro's Cuba were tolerated.

Conservative church leaders were recruited to deliver sermons against "ungodly" communism, media pundits were recruited to write anti-communist columns. William Casey, Reagan's first director of the CIA, is famously quoted as having said "We'll know our disinformation program is complete when everything the American public believes is false."

During Reagan's reign, there was very little mention in the mass media about dissent against his policies, and when there was the occasional story, it was usually highly slanted to present the dissenters as deluded, if not outright agents of communist governments. This tight control over the media lasted throughout the Reagan/Bush era.

The media willingly repeated highly exaggerated claims by the Bush regime in order to justify a war in Kuwait. Despite rapidly becoming the largest anti-war movement in US history, the movement self-destructed through in-fighting, backstabbing, and gossip. Having experienced first-hand the shenanigans the FBI used while involved with Committee In Solidarity With the People of El Salvador in Dallas, Texas, in the 1980s, I can say with confidence that I saw similar tactics used to split the anti-Gulf War coalition in Austin, just a few years later. "Respectable" activists accused more militant protesters of being provocateurs. I was "outed" by some such activists because I chose to use a pseudonym in public. Two self-anointed leaders of the coalition revealed my and a comrade's names, while others accused another comrade, who had been beaten and jailed for anti-apartheid protests a few years earlier, of being an undercover cop.

Throughout the Reagan/Bush era, people who tried to talk about their harassment were often ridiculed and called paranoid. They lost friends, and often times relatives would distance themselves from activists, which left the activists isolated and vulnerable. They lost jobs, their careers were ruined. Professional journalists were blackballed by the media and could only have their investigative work published in the dissident press, which meant little or no pay. Many activists and journalists became addicted to drugs or alcohol. Many committed suicide.

In the Clinton years, it was possible for the government to mass murder people without much public outcry, as he demonstrated with his siege and extermination of the Branch Davidian sect in Waco, Texas.

Again and again, no matter who was in office, the FBI kept up a campaign of harassment against dissenters. Yet, they seldom went after White Supremacist groups, who have carried out many of the most lethal terrorist attacks in the US.

This is likely because the irregular forces they regularly employ to target activists are often from fascist or racist organizations. After WW1, when much of the APL was absorbed into the newly-formed FBI, many of those left over joined the KKK.

All of this is relevant because these methods are all still used in the 21st century.

Inventing Terrorism, Ignoring the Terrorists

Combating property destruction by animal rights activists and environmentalists was identified by former FBI Director Robert Mueller in 2006 as one of the agency's highest priorities. Despite the fact that not one person has been killed due to any of these activities.

But, since the 9/12/01, more than 70 percent of the lethal attacks by terrorists in the US have been carried out by white supremacists or neo-nazi groups and individuals who hold sympathetic views. President Trump has gone so far as to direct the government to focus all of its counter-terrorist activities in America on Islamic extremists.

Under the Obama administrations, almost 100 percent of all so-called terrorist incidents were instigated by the FBI or other, local police agencies. This is particularly true of his administration's record of entrapping Muslims in terrorist schemes.

The script in these cases follows a similar pattern. The FBI picks a target for recruitment into a terror plot. They use an informant or an undercover agent to contact the person, then begin the process of "radicalizing" the target into joining in on a plot to bomb something. Every person the targeted individual meets along the way – the instigator of the plot, the people providing explosives, even instructions on how to create and detonate the devices – are all FBI, police, or their lackeys. They will even come across with cash. Whatever it takes.

But, of course, when the appointed time for carrying out the action comes: "SURPRISE! You're busted!"

Then, there are press conferences, where the FBI is praised to the heavens for stopping this horrible thing from happening. But, no matter how many times people – particularly defense attorneys – point out that the person involved was duped by the FBI to do something the targeted individuals were at times very unenthusiastic about, the media sensationalism steamrolls the truth of the matter, and the "terrorist" is sent off to prison.

"The problem with the cases we're talking about is that defendants would not have done anything if not kicked in the ass by government agents," says Martin Stolar, a lawyer who represented a man caught in a 2004 sting involving New York's Herald Square subway station. "They're creating crimes to solve crimes so they can claim a victory in the war on terror."

The Informants Trevor Aaronson, September/October 2011 – **Mother Jones**

Entrapping Anarchists

Likewise, the government has been entrapping Anarchists involved in anti-war protests into "terror" plots. When it comes to snaring US citizens with their traps, the FBI uses undercover agents to insinuate themselves into a local scene, gain the locals' trust, then start the plot a-rolling.

During G.W. Bush's reign, an undercover agent seduced a forest defense activist into a long-term relationship, then encouraged and enabled him to form an underground cell to carry out bombings. She provided transportation, money, explosives, and isolated cabins in the mountains to build bombs. The cell considered her their leader. The cell was arrested, even though they never carried out any actions.

According to an FBI document entitled “**Anarchist Extremist Overview**,” Anarchists are “criminals seeking an ideology to justify their activities.” The document goes on to wail and moan about how Anarchists are devising new and more extreme weapons to pursue their criminal activity. Of course, they don’t mention that it is actually their own agents who are providing the materials and knowledge to make these weapons.

In a police raid on a Chicago house, 11 people were arrested. 2 of them were undercover FBI agents, who had shown up during Occupy Chicago and became part of the scene. After who’s-who got sorted out, it became known that law enforcement was working with a military and intelligence contractor with ties to the National Security Agency – Booz Hamilton (whistle-blower Edward Snowden’s former employer).

The fact that the government is outsourcing its repression of dissent is a harrowing turn of events. Though it does keep within the established practice of the FBI utilizing irregular forces, issues of accountability, oversight, mismanagement, and overly-zealous extremists are much more of a concern when secretive agencies – both public and private – are involved. In today’s current atmosphere of fake news, ass-kissing media, and lazy, celebrity-driven infotainment, if an actual terror attack were to happen, the truth about who was behind it might never be known, and intentionally covered-up in the interest of national security.

The legal harassment of Anarchists and Animal Liberation activists will force their comrades and supporters – who often eke out a subsistent life, near the bottom of the economy – to spend themselves into extreme poverty in order to defend themselves and their comrades in court. Having dozens, if not hundreds of comrades incarcerated can overwhelm an informal, voluntary collection of punks and activists, emotionally as well as financially.

It wasn’t only bullets and bludgeons that destroyed the Industrial Workers of the World. The Feds also tapped out their membership’s finances by forcing them to defend themselves in courts across the country. This left them blacklisted by employers and scarcely able to fend for themselves after the One Big Union was crushed, adrift and pauperized, just before the Great Depression.

And just to let us know what to expect in this new era of reality TVesque horrors, a church in Alabama has been authorized to form its own police forces.

This is in addition to the forces collected together by several regional Joint Task Forces of Terrorism, specially-created entities that co-ordinate municipal, county, state, and federal law enforcement agencies to carry out joint actions. Many, if not most, of the Bush II’s operations described above were projects of such JTFTs. And these law enforcement agencies – especially at the federal level – are also hiring mercenary forces to help out, and have demonstrated their willingness to utilize irregular forces to do their “dirty work” when they really want to stir things up.

Fighting Back

To look back at the well-documented era of COINTELPRO as something from a long-ago time is to ignore the challenges we all face if we choose to fight against the Corporate States of America, with it’s new-found confidence in White Supremacy, vast military, mercenary, and police forces, and a weird, religious fervor to excuse everything it wants to force on an unwilling world. America has never stopped its low-intensity war against dissent, and it won’t. It can’t –

those currently in power know very well that their continued rule relies on silencing those who speak out against their inhuman agenda.

US foreign policy has revived slavery in Africa, and many Americans truly believe that the ones responsible for this are wonderful, almost god-like people. Do you think they will so much as notice when dissenters are rounded up into detention centers? Or gunned down in the streets by the police? There was scarcely a word of protest against the APL during WW1, when the world was much more aware of class conflict. They appeared as if out of nowhere, in large numbers, and terrorized the public into silent compliance nationwide.

So far, American radicals have refused to learn from the contemporary revolutionaries around the world, who are actively creating the communities they want to see. In many instances, they are reviving older, indigenous cultures, and adapting them to accommodate current tech and social developments. This is the way to revolutionary change, and many of us trapped in the West have yet to undertake this task. Perhaps we consider ourselves too mired in capitalist muck to think we can escape from it.

We face difficult circumstances, and it's about time we faced up to the facts. Protesting will not create the world we carry in our hearts and minds. Not matter how much we riot.

Certainly, circumstances vary from place to place, with different challenges to overcome, and we face an enemy who seems unstoppable. To many people before us, the divine authority of god-emperors was too terrifying to stand against. To many people before us, the authority and weapons of the king were not to be challenged. Those worlds do not exist anymore, and the only reason this one continues is because we continue to devote our energy to its perpetuation.

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