

FBI agent testifies in Hampton suit

By Bonne Nesbitt
National Staff Writer

On Nov. 19, 1969, FBI informant William O'Neal helped his contacting agent draw up a floor plan of an apartment in a dingy westside Chicago neighborhood. The bed location of one occupant was marked with an "X."

Two weeks later, 14 policemen armed with weapons and the information conducted a "weapons raid" on the apartment, which belonged to Fred Hampton, chairman of the Illinois Black Panther party. Hampton was killed in his bed by two bullets fired close range into the head. Hampton's bed was the one marked "X."

Mark Clark, a downstate party leader temporarily staying at the apartment, was also killed and four of seven other Panthers were wounded.

Seven years later, the state's attorney who authorized the raid, two assistants, three FBI officials, the 14 policemen and O'Neal are defendants in a \$47.7 million civil suit filed by the families of Hampton and Clark and the seven survivors and are charged with unlawfully conspiring and carrying out the killings of Hampton and Clark and the physical and other injuries to the survivors.

Because of delays, the suit filed in the spring of 1970 did not come to trial until January before Judge Joseph S. Perry in Illinois District Court.

Last week, a climax of sorts occurred when O'Neal testified that the government should have paid him more money for his services.

"Frankly, I don't believe I was paid enough," said O'Neal, whose FBI salary was \$900 a month at the time of the Hampton apartment raid. "My life was in danger during that time and I feel I more than earned the money," he said in the suddenly quiet courtroom.

O'Neal had said moments before that he had been a Hampton pallbearer as "an act of condolence" because he "felt sorry Hampton had gotten killed" in the raid he helped to make possible.

Under cross-examination by attorney Jeffrey Haas, O'Neal admitted his actions "also served to protect my cover." Haas further disclosed that O'Neal, to "protect his cover," also went to Hampton's mother and volunteered to drive her to the funeral establishment.

►Was well paid.

Despite his testimony, FBI-produced documents show O'Neal was and indeed still is well paid.

Only four days after the deaths, the Chicago FBI office requested a \$300 bonus for O'Neal in payment for his "uniquely valuable services."

A memo to FBI director J. Edgar Hoover said "The raid was based on information furnished by the informant...this information was not available from any other source...and proved to be of tremendous value in that it saved injury and possible death to police officers participating in the raid." Hoover approved the request Dec. 11, 1969, and O'Neal was paid Dec. 23 by his contacting agent, Roy Mitchell.

Other documents show O'Neal was paid \$30,000 from 1969 to July 1972 and \$34,590 from July 1972 to November 1973. Another document says O'Neal stopped receiving payments then, but also notes that he was, in fact, paid an undisclosed amount for December 1973 and January 1974.

That same document shows O'Neal's payments were reactivated at \$1080 a month as of September 1975 and that he is still receiving that amount. O'Neal testified he is doing nothing to earn the money which he calls "subsistence" pay.

►Also "witness fees."

The \$1,000 a month isn't the only money the government is paying O'Neal, how-

FBI informant O'Neal was a Hampton pallbearer as "an act of condolence;" he said he "felt sorry Hampton had gotten killed" in the raid he helped to make possible.

Under cross-examination O'Neal admitted his actions "also served to protect my cover."

Photo by Paul Sequeira



On left, murdered Panther Fred Hampton's bed, marked "X" on informant's plan. On right, Panther lawyer Jeffrey Haas.

ever. New documents released within the week show he has also received at least \$18,000 in "witness fees" from the U.S. attorney's office. The vouchers are signed by one of his defense federal attorneys.

In his testimony, O'Neal has said his association with Mitchell began in early 1968 when he gave Mitchell the name of a friend in connection with an auto theft charge. O'Neal said he informed on his "friend" because "Mitchell was an FBI agent and he requested certain information and I felt it somewhat of a privilege to cooperate with him as much as I could."

He denied Mitchell told him he was a suspect himself and denied his reason for informing on his "friend" was money. He conceded Mitchell paid him for the information but didn't remember the amount.

From February through July 1968, O'Neal regularly worked with Mitchell. "There were numerous times that I supplied him with information that was relevant to his duties," he testified.

►Joined Panthers in 1968.

In December 1968 O'Neal joined the Black Panther party, not for the money, but because Mitchell asked him to. "An agent of the federal government was asking me to join the Black Panther party," O'Neal said. "Yes, I was interested in myself, law enforcement and what the FBI stood for." In an earlier deposition, O'Neal said the opposite, Haas pointed out.

O'Neal testified he became the Panther security chief within two months of joining the party, but said he proposed no ideas for maintaining party security. He did not deny constructing an electric chair designed to "scare potential informants." He denied it was his idea, however. A memo written by him outlining an elaborate plan to rig Panther office doors and windows electrically to "electrocute" intruders was also not his idea, he said.

He also testified he had nothing to do with writing a by-lined article in the party newspaper denouncing another Panther as an informant.

►Evasive, vague and unresponsive.

O'Neal was often evasive, vague and un-

In These Times photo by Jane Melnick



responsive in his answers to questions about his duties and specific information he gave Mitchell. "Yes, that was the sort of information I would have made available to him, but I don't specifically recall," was a typical answer. And Mitchell never gave O'Neal any specific instructions whatsoever, he said.

When confronted with a copy of the

Hampton apartment floor plan, he refused either to admit or deny providing the information it contains.

O'Neal's role as an informant was uncovered three years ago during the murder trial of former Chicago policeman Stanley Robinson. Robinson, a black police sergeant accused of heading a narcotics "hit squad," was charged with the slayings of two drug pushers when he named O'Neal. O'Neal was the chief witness against Robinson, who was convicted largely as a result of his testimony.

Since Mitchell and O'Neal were joined to the Hampton suit Dec. 3, 1974, the government has been forced to produce thousands of documents that show the raid was just a small part of the bureau's counterintelligence program (Cointelpro).

Cointelpro was launched in July 1969 to disrupt organizations the bureau considered subversive. According to an FBI memo, its goals in relation to black nationalist groups were "to prevent the rise of a black messiah who could unify and electrify the militant black nationalist movement." To achieve this, Cointelpro sought to "espouse, disrupt and misdirect, discredit and otherwise neutralize" black movement organizations.

Last May the Senate Intelligence Committee claimed Cointelpro had directed 233 separate operations against the Panthers between July 1969 and April 1971, when the program allegedly was terminated.

The report also cited the Hampton apartment raid as an example of how Cointelpro used local police agencies to carry out raids—whether justified or not—on Panther homes.

As a result of information disclosed through the Hampton suit and the committee investigation, the party has filed a \$100 million suit for damages against a number of present and former government officials.

Meanwhile, O'Neal is expected to continue his testimony for another week. ■

Justice Dept. refuses to notify FBI targets

Washington. If you were a target of Cointelpro—the FBI campaign of dirty tricks against alleged subversives—you may never know. Unless you file a Freedom of Information request (and perhaps that is no guarantee), you'll have to trust the government to decide whether you were sufficiently harmed to warrant notification.

The Justice Department's Office of Professional Responsibility has nearly completed a review of 2,370 "publicly acknowledged" counterintelligence actions. It has sent out only 166 letters, with 59 more due.

Michael E. Shaheen Jr., the program director, believes it would be "unprofessional" to contact everyone. If harm was done or even if harm might have been done, Shaheen says, "we opt for notification."

The department defines harm as any adverse and unexpected alteration of an individual's life. Not all Cointelpro actions had that effect, Shaheen says. For example, Jewish members of the U.S. Communist party received anonymous newspaper clippings about anti-semitic attitudes in the Soviet Union. They could have read those articles in the paper themselves, Shaheen contends. Their lives were not disrupted sufficiently to justify notification. Although this action may have caused harm to the party, the department only notifies individuals, not organizations.

Why not just contact everyone?

Shaheen says the notification act itself

is an intrusion. A deputy U.S. marshal must hand-deliver the letter. Neighbors, spouses and children might want to know about it. Many people don't want it known that they were ever on a Cointelpro list, were ever considered subversive or were ever involved in even the hint of scandal, real or fabricated.

Timothy H. Ingram, staff director of the House subcommittee on government information and individual rights, suggests another reason why the department might not want to notify everyone.

"The Justice Department can, in effect, restrict the number of lawsuits against the government by restricting the number of people notified of improper conduct."

"That's patently absurd," Shaheen replies. "If the Justice Department wanted to do that we could have done what the Central Intelligence Agency did and have no notification program at all."

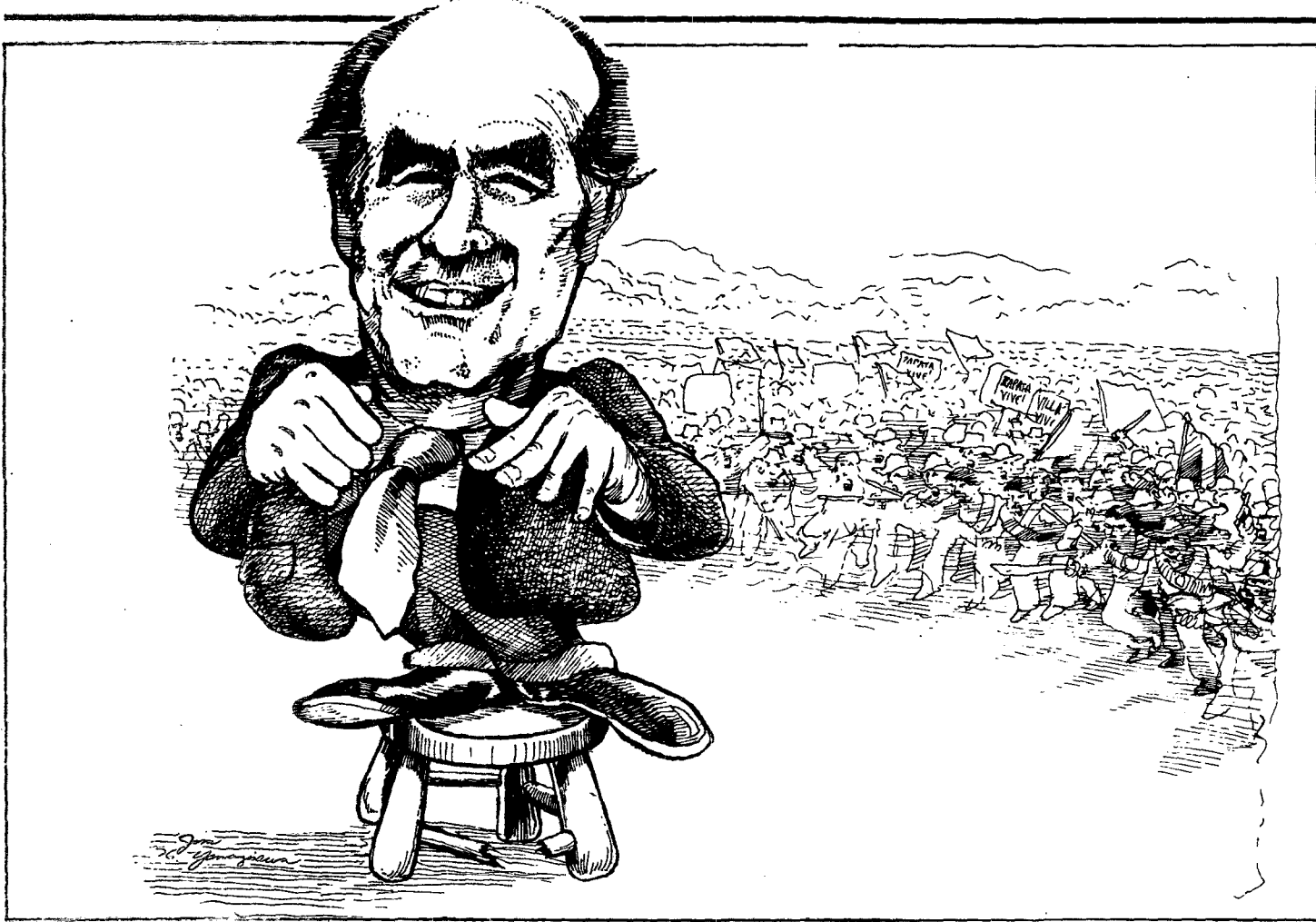
If only several hundred of the 2,370 Cointelpro actions warrant letters of notification, it's because "the overwhelming majority" of those actions were simply unsuccessful, Shaheen says.

Cointelpro was only one of an unknown number of FBI harassment programs. The notification effort, however, is only contacting victims of Cointelpro activities and not all victims of FBI harassment.

—Ted Clark

Ted Clark is a reporter for the Washington, D.C., Pacifica radio station.

IN THE WORLD



Mexican agrarian conflict

By Margit Birge

Berkeley, Calif. Farmworkers and peasants lined the road through the Yaqui Valley of Sonora, the Mexican state bordering Arizona. "We're waiting for the president who will declare that this land is ours," a man said.

Some of the richest agricultural lands in Latin America are in the valley and it produces 45 percent of Mexico's wheat, so the stakes were high. Hundreds of army troops were stationed there, sent to isolate workers occupying land with rifles and machineguns. In two years, more than 100 farmworkers have been killed in confrontations with the army, police and landowners.

But this time, in early November, most farmworkers were confident that Echeverria government's promises to distribute all big landholdings would be fulfilled.

For some, their wish came true. Acting on the Agrarian Reform Law that prohibits landholdings of more than 250 acres, President Luis Echeverria expropriated 240,000 acres of land Nov. 19 and distributed it to 9,000 farmworker families. The government hoped this would regain farmworker support for the 40-year ruling Institutional Revolutionary party. Their support was especially needed after devaluations brought price increases of up to 100 percent on basic food items and provoked widespread discontent.

But the conflict cannot be resolved so quickly. The new government of Jose Lopez Portillo, which took office Dec. 1, faces growing political pressures from all sides.

Land invasions are continuing everywhere, despite press-created images that the conflict has been settled. Growing numbers of workers are joining independent organizations challenging party-controlled peasant and farmworker unions. In addition, landowners are making tighter alliances with business groups to protest expropriations. Meanwhile, economic conditions that forced farmworkers to take mass actions have not changed. And the economic crisis affecting all capitalist countries leaves little room for the government to maneuver.

►Growing migrant force.

Changes in the Mexican fields are similar to those in U.S. agriculture. Agribusiness corporations have bought land and are

"The new government of Jose Lopez Portillo, which took office Dec. 1, faces growing political pressures from all sides."

monopolizing the marketing of fresh produce. U.S. corporations often provide the only source of credit, seeds and fertilizer for small farmers; in this way, with landowners, they can control production.

Small farmers who cannot afford the new technology or who cannot compete with big landowners are being forced to lease their land and work on the big estates. Together with farmworkers who do not own land, these farmers make up a growing migrant labor force that travels the coast each year, following the crops as they are harvested.

Farmworkers in northwest Mexico harvest vegetables that make up more than \$100 million a year in exports. Yet they rarely earn more than \$5 a day if they can work year-round. This is why many farmworkers go to central Mexico cities or come to the U.S. in search of better jobs.

The recession of course has meant fewer jobs in the cities and stricter immigration controls at the border. And this is what has provoked the militant invasions.

Farmworker actions are part of a wave of land invasions that began in 1975. By this November, close to 50,000 farmworkers had mobilized to demand land throughout northwest Mexico.

A central issue of the agrarian conflict is the invasion leadership.

In Sonora, the Independent Peasant Front, an organization not connected with the party, initiated most of the invasions. Their move forced the party-backed Pacto de Ocampo, a coalition of several farmworker organizations, to support the mobilizations.

In Sinaloa, just south of Sonora, party-backed groups have urged farmworkers to end occupations after a few days and wait for court rulings to resolve the conflict. (Many farmworkers have waited 20 to 30 years for court rulings on expropriations.) In contrast, independent groups have been more militant and have paralyzed production for weeks.

►Violence and land.

The Echeverria government responded by using violence against the more militant groups and rewarding loyal party followers with expropriated land. The same contradictory policy was followed with landowners: Echeverria criticized "greedy" landowners for using the economic situation for private gain, while simultaneously supporting their right to block land-reform implementation through the courts.

When Echeverria left office, neither landowners nor farmworkers were satisfied. Agribusiness interests made alliances with the National Chambers of Commerce and Industry to protest government policy. Businesses and industries in at least eight states participated Nov. 24 in a shutdown to protest the Sonora land expropriation.

For farmworkers, the future is uncertain. Expropriations may not hold up against court challenges. If the expropriations do hold, those who benefit and receive land will need large amounts of technical aid, in addition to seeds and fertilizer. Most planting must be finished by Dec. 15, so time is running short. If farmworkers cannot form collective marketing arrangements they will not obtain good prices.

Already farmworkers who received land distributed last year in Sinaloa are renting it back to original owners, who have the technology and training necessary to run production. If that pattern continues, it raises doubts about the viability of redistributing land under the present system.

The situation in the countryside remains tense. Farmworkers without land continue their fight. Thousands are still camped as of mid-December along to roads in Sinaloa. Invasions continue throughout the country. Independent groups from all over the country are organizing a national, independent farmworkers and peasant organization. About 2,000 farmworkers camped for 36 hours Dec. 8 in the offices of the agrarian reform secretary in Mexico City. They told reporters: "Not even God will stop our fight."

Margit Birge, who works at Peoples Translation Service in Berkeley, Calif., has just returned from a five-week trip to Mexico. Two years ago she studied political economy at the National Autonomous University in Mexico City.

IN SHORT

Spanish elections show desire to end Franco era

Madrid. In a statement issued Dec. 16, Spain's main Socialist party said the vast number of "yes" votes in the nationwide referendum on political reform showed the people's desire for getting rid of the system bequeathed by Gen. Francisco Franco.

The Socialist Workers' party, which had supported the boycott, accused the government of abusing its control of the news media and using bans on public meetings and arrests to silence the opposition during the campaign.

It said if general elections, scheduled before June under the reforms, were held in the same conditions, "they would be a farce."

Certainly the opposition's campaign was dwarfed by the government's massive advertising drive and only a handful of the politicians allowed to speak on television recommended a boycott.

The average Spaniard saw few of the anti-referendum wall slogans painted on the streets of Madrid and Barcelona. They were quickly whitewashed over by the authorities during the night.

—Reuters

While Portuguese parties all claim election gains

Lisbon, Portugal. Portuguese Prime Minister Mario Soares declared Dec. 12's local government elections gave his minority Socialist government a vote of confidence—but three opposition leaders disagreed.

They questioned his claim, insisting in a televised debate Dec. 13 that each of their parties had made the most gains.

In a low turnout—65 percent voted, compared with 75 percent in the June presidential election and 92 percent in the April parliamentary poll—the Socialist party led with 33.28 percent of the votes with results in 30 of the 4,035 parishes still to be declared.

It was followed by the Social Democrat party 24.28 percent, the United Peoples Electoral Front (Communist) 17.69, the Center Democrat party 16.63 and the Popular Unity Movement (radical left) 2.49 percent.

Soares said the vote was for town hall officials rather than a national government but noted that opposition parties had presented it as a plebiscite on his government. "It was a certain victory for the Socialists in this respect too," he said.

Socialists dropped 2 percent from the poll in the April parliamentary elections. They have been ruling for five months as the country's first democratic government in 30 years. Communists did a bit better than before. The others were little changed in their percentages.

Prof. Diogo Freitas do Amaral of the Center Democrats said the outcome showed government support was limited strictly to the Socialist electorate.

Dr. Francisco sa Carneiro, chairman of the Social Democrats, said he did not wish to join in a coalition government with the Socialists.

—Reuters