

How the ADL surveilled and slandered the wartime Congress

by Jeffrey Steinberg

On Oct. 3, 6, and 7, 1947, the House of Representatives subcommittee of the committee on expenditures in the executive departments held extensive public hearings into illegal surveillance and file gathering on American citizens by the United States Civil Service Commission. The hearings, chaired by Rep. Clare E. Hoffman of Michigan, were apparently triggered by news accounts targeting members of the Senate and the House as wartime subversives. The sources of that libelous information were the "investigators' leads" files maintained by the Civil Service Commission.

Those files, gathered on over 750,000 American citizens who never applied for government jobs, were drawn from a range of public and private sources. One of the primary sources was the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL) and an ADL front group known as Friends of Democracy, Inc.

Representative Hoffman and other subcommittee members interrogated three top officials of the Civil Service Commission, who systematically dodged questions about their illegal links to the ADL and Friends of Democracy, Inc., and refused to provide the subcommittee with copies of the dossiers or any information on how they colluded with the ADL. However, in a Dec. 19, 1947 letter to Hoffman, Civil Service Commission President Harry B. Mitchell admitted that between 6,000 and 7,000 dossiers maintained in the commission's files were obtained from the ADL. Over 20,000 files were provided by Friends of Democracy, Inc.

At the time, the ADL did not have an in-house Fact-Finding Division, as it does now. Its spying on American citizens was conducted through a small army of private investigators, who in turn funneled their information to a New York City law firm, Mintzer and Levy, of 39 Broadway, Room 3305, New York City.

Infiltration and dirty tricks

One of the ADL and the Friends of Democracy, Inc.'s leading wartime operators was John Roy Carlson, a pseudonym used by one Avedis Derounian. Similar to the *modus operandi* of Roy Bullock and his confederates today, Carlson/Derounian carried out extensive infiltration and disruption of German-American groups and the America First movement. His exploits were catalogued in a series of auto-

biographical books, the most famous of which is *Undercover*.

While some of the targets of his spying activities were undoubtedly engaged in subversive activities on behalf of the Nazis, among others, a vast majority of his targets were innocent of any subversive ties or actions, and these people suffered a great deal as the result of the ADL's machinations.

Among the dirty tricks that Derounian describes in *Undercover* was how he got an informant in the German American Bund to meet with a congressman who opposed U.S. entry into the war as a dumb giant on a British leash, without revealing to the congressman the informant's affiliation with the Bund. After the meeting, Derounian's ADL spymasters ran a smear campaign to the effect that the congressman was in bed with the Nazis. In his two autobiographical books, Derounian describes numerous such entrapment, smear, and related dirty tricks.

Carlson/Derounian was closely involved with British Intelligence's Sir William Stephenson, head of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), and with the FBI's Division Five. In fact, *Room 3603*, which is the semi-official history of Stephenson's role as British Security Coordinator to the United States, makes clear that Stephenson controlled an array of front groups that carried out dirty tricks against opponents. These included Friends of Democracy, Inc. and the Fight for Freedom Committee. The Naval Intelligence unit in New York City, headed by Vincent Astor, who had cut his teeth in a private intelligence group founded by President Teddy Roosevelt's children, known as The Room, also worked closely with Sir William Stephenson and the ADL.

Although the United States had not entered the war yet, Sir William Stephenson conducted espionage upon U.S. officials, carried out dirty tricks and used smear tactics against U.S. citizens on American soil, as well as other illegal acts. His criminal enterprise was assisted by ADL operatives like Avedis Derounian. Anti-Defamation League links to the agencies that carried out this campaign with Sir William Stephenson have continued ever since that time.

In his interrogations by the San Francisco police, Roy Bullock admitted that he was recruited to work for the ADL by Carlson, with whom he maintained a correspondence in the early 1950s.

Commission spying

The Civil Service Commission's "investigators' leads" files, comprised of approximately 750,000 index cards, contained personal biographical data on individuals suspected of having some kind of contact with members of a wide range of organizations from pro-communist to pro-fascist. During intensive questioning by members of the subcommittee, Civil Service Commission officials James E. Hatcher, Frances Perkins, and Harry Mitchell openly admitted that the ADL and Friends of Democracy material, as well as other data compiled in the "investigators' leads" index, had been illegally gathered.

Commission President Mitchell, however, tried to downplay the implications of the spying by pointing out that "there is no evidence against the names on the list."

To which subcommittee chairman Hoffman responded: "But it furnishes a most admirable smear list . . . [if someone can say the information is out of the Civil Service Commission files] when it appears that the only source of the information is the Friends of Democracy or the Anti-Defamation League and it is all hearsay."

Mitchell confirmed the danger of the files being used for smears. Rep. Porter Hardy, Jr. of Virginia asked how the files had sometimes gotten into the hands of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the House Un-American Activities Committee. Mitchell testified that the files were open to "any person who was conducting an investigation of the records."

Indeed, one of the initial reasons for the hearings was the appearance of stories under the byline of Walter Winchell and other reporters closely allied with the FBI and the ADL, containing information leaked from the Civil Service files smearing senators and congressmen.

Subcommittee chairman Clare E. Hoffman repeatedly asked Commission President Mitchell to explain what files from a private law firm in New York and the ADL were doing being used as U.S. government records. He pointed out that "quite a few cards, stating that this was from the subversive files in the office of Attorneys Mintzer & Levy . . . and the files were made up in cooperation with . . . the Anti-Defamation League, and also . . . that this information must not be disclosed, that it is confidential and secret and under no circumstances to be divulged, and that further information about it may be secured by contacting the office of Mintzer & Levy."

The Civil Service Commission admitted that for 60 days it had a staff of nearly 100 people in New York dumping this material into its files. However, Commission President Mitchell pleaded ignorance, when he was asked repeatedly to state who in his office was in contact with the ADL and how arrangements had been made for copying their files. Finally, Mitchell said, "It is possible that the information may have been gotten from the FBI files. We have contact with the FBI files."

On Dec. 19, 1947, Mitchell sent a response to subcommittee chairman Hoffman stating:

"In the third paragraph of your letter, inquiry is made as to whether any of the material contained in the reference file was secured from the Anti-Defamation League, the Friends of Democracy. . . . In respect to your inquiry relative to the Anti-Defamation League as a source of information for the establishment of the file, the Commission's records disclose that this particular organization is not listed by name as a direct source in connection with the compilation of the 487,033 cards at New York City in June and July 1943. However, a careful check of records reveals that 6,000 or 7,000 cards were based on information secured from a confidential source, and such confidential source, according to our understanding, compiled at least some of its information in cooperation with the Anti-Defamation League."

Unadulterated gossip

In its official history, *Not the Work of One Day*, the late ADL national director Benjamin Epstein states that, as U.S. involvement in World War II approached, the ADL opened up its files on alleged subversives and let the FBI make copies of them. According to FBI files released under the Freedom of Information Act, one ADL official boasted publicly that the League had assisted the Bureau in investigating 373 cases of "subversives." As with the Civil Service Commission, the FBI dumped this ADL material unscreened into its file base. The FBI's practice of unquestioning acceptance of the ADL's decisions on who was and who was not a "subversive" truly held what Rep. Clare Hoffman called the makings of "a most admirable smear list."

This was confirmed by the attorney general in a July 16, 1943 memorandum to Assistant Attorney General Hugh B. Cox and FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover. The attorney general wrote that the FBI must stop using the ADL as a reliable judge of whether someone was a "subversive," adding:

"After full re-consideration of these individual danger classifications, I am satisfied that they serve no useful purpose. . . . It is now clear to me that the classification system is inherently unreliable. The evidence used for the purpose of making the classifications was inadequate; the standards applied to the evidence for the purpose of making the classifications was defective; and finally, the notion that it is possible to make a valid determination as to how dangerous a person is in the abstract and without reference to time, environment, and other relevant circumstances, is impractical, unwise, and dangerous."

Thus in 1943, the U. S. attorney general had determined that the Anti-Defamation League's "fact finding" was gossip to be disregarded. Yet, Civil Service Commission President Mitchell was still defending his agency's wholesale copying of such garbage from ADL spying and lies into the commission's files during questioning by Congress some four years later.