

Editorial

Ashcroft Scraps Post-Cointelpro FBI Guidelines

On May 30, Attorney General John Ashcroft and his hand-picked FBI Director, Robert Mueller, announced wholesale revision of the guidelines for FBI investigations, throwing out virtually all of the reforms which had been made in the wake of the exposures of the FBI's Cointelpro operations and the widespread violations of constitutional rights which were rampant in the 1950s and '60s. No one should be surprised.

Lyndon LaRouche warned you, when Ashcroft's nomination was before the Senate in January 2001, that under crisis conditions, Ashcroft would be used to force through dictatorial measures comparable to the 1933 Nazi emergency laws, the *Notverordnungen*.

Predictably, Ashcroft used the Sept. 11 attacks as the pretext to ram "anti-terrorism" laws through Congress, which gave the FBI and Department of Justice vastly expanded powers of surveillance, detention, and prosecution—including powers which the Justice Department had been seeking for years, but which Congress had, up to that point, refused to grant.

Hundreds of people, mostly of Middle Eastern origin, were rounded up and detained, without access to a lawyer, and subject to secret court proceedings. It is estimated that about 1,200 people have been detained, although no one knows the precise number, or how many are still being held, or how many have been deported. "These are hundreds of people who have essentially disappeared. They were tried in secret detention hearings, held in detention centers, then put on planes. No one knows what happened," said a senior civil liberties lawyer recently.

Now, Ashcroft and the Justice Department apparatus have taken the process yet one step further, scrapping the guidelines over FBI investigations which have been in effect, in one form or another, since 1976. Under the revised guidelines, FBI agents will be free to monitor religious and political organizations, among other activities protected by the First Amendment.

In the wake of the Church and Pike Committee hearings in the 1970s on abuses by U.S. intelligence agencies, guidelines were adopted which, at least in principle, barred the FBI or other agencies from monitoring

such activities unless there was reason to believe that Federal laws were being violated, or were about to be violated. Under the changes announced on May 30, all such restrictions have apparently been lifted.

Ashcroft said that, from the first moments after the Sept. 11 attacks, "we learned . . . that we must begin a concerted effort to free the field agents, the brave men and women on the front lines, from the bureaucratic, organizational, and operational restrictions and structures that had hindered them from doing their jobs effectively." FBI agents "are frustrated because many of our own internal restrictions have hampered our ability to fight terrorism," Ashcroft said. He falsely claimed that the guidelines drawn up in the 1970s, "provide limitations and guidance over and above all the requirements and safeguards imposed by the Constitution, so that these are additional restrictions other than constitutional ones."

The fact of the matter, is that the guidelines were promulgated because Congress and the courts had found massive constitutional violations by the FBI and other agencies. On top of all this, Ashcroft announced that the new guidelines will not only pertain to terrorism investigations, but also to criminal intelligence and racketeering investigations.

All this is not merely a throw-back to the 1960s. Ashcroft's latest actions take place under conditions of global financial collapse, the crumbling of the Bush Administration's policies in all directions, and the establishment of the U.S. Northern Command (US-NORTHCOM), which Lyndon LaRouche described as "a preparation for the Pentagon to cross the Potomac one morning, to place the Attorney General and his minions in power, reducing the President himself to a ceremonial, or even lesser figure in the configuration."

It is worth recalling, that the mid-1970s Congressional investigations of FBI and CIA abuses, were preceded by extensive but largely forgotten Congressional investigations of military surveillance operations directed against U.S. citizens and organizations in the 1960s and early '70s.

You should have listened to LaRouche.