

COPY

COPY

COPY

COPY

STATEMENT TO NEWS CONFERENCE BY JOHN RATLIFF, PRDF
LEGAL STAFF

Yesterday we received the government's first answer to a complaint filed by Leonard Boudin on behalf of the Socialist Workers Party and the Young Socialist Alliance on July 18 of this year. With their answer they also filed a motion to dismiss the charges against Richard Nixon on the grounds that the Federal court lacks jurisdiction over the President.

The government's answer has several astonishing admissions which only begin to show the extent of government harassment of political organizations which oppose administration policy.

They admit that the FBI bugged the SWP from 1945 to 1963, and claim "national security" as the justification. We know that the bugging continues.

They admit that the FBI maintained a program called the "SWP Disruption Program" from 1961 to 1969 and pretend that it was merely an attempt to publicize the FBI's opinion of the SWP. Documents prove that its real intent was to disrupt the party's functioning. It was not ended until at least 1971.

The government admits that anyone who "indicates" membership in the SWP is subject to an FBI investigation. This obviously inhibits support for SWP election campaigns. In fact, people who simply signed a nominating petition or supported SWP candidates have been subject to such investigations.

They admit it that FBI agents may have questioned SWP members and their landlords, employers and prospective employers, giving an FBI characterization of the SWP and YSA. The government also admits that this questioning may have had an effect on the conduct of such individuals. This is delicate double-talk for a systematic program of harassment that has produced incidents in over 40 cities, some of which resulted in victimization of members of the SWP and YSA.

The government admits attempting to induce SWPers to become government agents and informers.

The intent of this broad program of government activity is to frighten and discourage supporters and potential supporters of the SWP and YSA.

The government claims it has a right to do these things. But when the government singles out and harasses a political group on the basis of its ideas and programs, it threatens everyone's First, Fourth and Fourteenth Amendment rights. We hope that by winning this case we can help force such actions to an end.

The government motion fails to absolve Nixon of responsibility for his administration's attacks on civil liberties. He is the chief conspirator and ultimate authority for the illegal and unconstitutional actions of the various federal agencies involved. Our lawyers will be offering counter-arguments to the Nixon motion in the immediate future.

We have already asked the government for further documents on the "Disruption Program," and documents relating to mail covers. We will proceed with whatever legal steps are necessary to force the production of these documents. We will also be filing new discovery motions and interrogatories, since the government holds much information which will prove the allegations they deny.

-January 10, 1974

###

SUMMARY OF GOVERNMENT ANSWER TO SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY 'WATERGATE SUIT' - 1/10/74

The U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York has filed a response to the lawsuit filed by the Socialist Workers Party on July 18, 1973. Some key admissions in the government document follow:

- 1) "During the period 1961-1969 the FBI conducted a program denominated 'SWP Disruption Program'..." (p.4, para.21)
- 2) "During the period 1945-1963 the FBI conducted limited national security electronic surveillance of certain plaintiffs." (p.4,para21)
- 3) That "investigations are conducted with respect to persons who indicate they are members of the SWP." (p. 5, para.25)
- 4) That investigations are conducted by the Civil Service Commission of government employees who are SWP members. (p.6, para. 31)
- 5) That the Army conducts such investigations of Army personnel. (p. 6, para. 32)
- 6) That in February 1972 the Los Angeles Police Department reported to the FBI the discovery of a wiretap on the home phone of James P. Cannon, at that time National Chairman of the SWP. (p.7,para 38)
- 7) That a mail cover was maintained on the SWP national headquarters from approximately January 23, 1973 to May 18, 1973 (p. 7, para. 43)

The U.S. Attorney also admitted that FBI agents "may have" done the following:

- 1) "on occasion characterized the objectives of the SWP, and asked questions relating thereto which may have influenced the conduct of SWP members." (p. 5, para. 27)
- 2) In cases of "investigations" of SWP members, FBI agents "may have" had "conversations with others having knowledge about the person's background." (p. 5, para. 26)
- 3) Disclosed political affiliations of SWP and YSA members to landlords, employers, etc., and thereby influenced the way such people acted toward members. (p. 5, para. 28)

4) Induced members of the organization to spy for the government on SWP activities. (p. 6, para. 29)

The U.S. Attorney claimed insufficient knowledge or information to admit or deny many other allegations. In addition, he denied outright some of the alleged acts cited in the complaint.

The U.S. Attorney also claimed that even if all the allegations of the complaint were true, including those concerning bombing, burglary and wiretaps, that the government agents would not have been acting "in excess of their statutory authority."

###

STATEMENT BY LINDA JENNESS, 1972 PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE OF THE
SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

In the documents being released here, the government has admitted the existence of a wide range of operations aimed at disrupting the activities of the Socialist Workers Party and at preventing the American people from hearing and considering the ideas of the SWP. This is a very significant admission, incomplete as it may be.

In fact, the past record of the government has been to deny anything they thought they had a chance to cover up. At various times, U.S. officials have denied actions ranging from the Ellsburg burglary and the widespread use of wiretaps to the bombing of Cambodia and the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. More and more of these denials are becoming "inoperative," as they put it, as the American people get some of the facts on the dirty tricks of this and other administrations.

One of the most glaring contradictions in the government's answer to our suit lies in the statement that the purpose of the FBI's "SWP Disruption Program" was to "alert the public" to the character of the SWP. That is a lie. Carl Stern of NBC News forced the release of FBI documents that describe these "disruption programs" directed against Black activists, the SWP and others. In these documents J. Edgar Hoover said, "In every instance, consideration should be given to disrupting the organized activity of these groups..." Hoover also said, "We must frustrate every effort of these groups to consolidate their forces or to recruit new and youthful adherents." This is the real face of a government that rules on behalf of a tiny capitalist minority. It has a history of sabotaging and disrupting antiwar, trade union, Black, communist and socialist activities. The American people want the truth about these government programs, not double talk from the government lawyers. We think this suit and similar legal actions can help to bring the facts out into the open.

You don't have to agree with the political ideas of the SWP to see the danger in allowing the government to attack groups and individuals because of their ideas. Our party will work to help expose such government operations, and I hope all those committed to civil liberties, regardless of their political point of view, will support the efforts of the Political Rights Defense Fund to carry this suit to a successful conclusion.

###