

white business flight from the proposed city. Advocates admit the possibilities but view the backlash argument largely as a scare tactic. Mandela could successfully challenge in court any discriminatory changes in the way state subsidies are distributed, they say, and the new city's prime location, growth of the area economy and lack of available land nearby insure a relatively stable commercial base. According to GRIP, any backlash would occur during the early phase of municipal incorporation and involve small businesses that could move easily; large companies have too much capital invested in the area to relocate capriciously. And the flight would stop once businesses realized that the new city was not a threat. Mandela would also aggressively recruit businesses—particularly minority companies—to set up shop.

Whatever one thinks of secession and the efficacy of such procedural politics for dealing with structural problems, the concept, especially in a symbolic sense, does pose a serious challenge to the community, the city and even the country. Twenty years after the civil rights movement, America remains a land of deep racial and class tensions. At the very least the debate over Mandela forces blacks and whites in Boston to confront that issue in their city. For blacks, the debate offers a healthy exercise in grass-roots democracy and a chance to assess their current status and future role in society. Whether they ultimately decide to secede, blacks can only benefit from a process that encourages practical thinking about local control, social justice and the means to achieve them. □

OTHER INITIATIVES

Across the country, several other important referendums will appear on ballots on November 8. In New York City, voters will be asked to approve an array of good-government reforms, including caps on campaign donations and spending in all municipal elections. Initiatives in the San Francisco Bay area include an attempt to stop the home-porting of the battleship U.S.S. Missouri and its nuclear weapons, a call for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a Berkeley proposal for a sister-city link to the Palestinian refugee camp of Jabalya. Antinuclear activists hope to shut down the Pilgrim and Yankee Rowe power plants in Massachusetts, though the state's ostensibly antinuclear Governor, Michael Dukakis, opposes their effort. Two initiatives mounted by the Republican right are Prop 102 in California, which would allow insurance companies to test applicants for AIDS and reject them if they are HIV-positive, and a slick, well-funded effort in Michigan to end state Medicaid funding for abortion. Though Prop 102 is expected to be defeated, the Michigan measure may succeed. According to the director of the People's Campaign for Choice, a Lansing-based coalition of groups fighting the initiative, such a victory would signal "a whole new look for the right-to-life movement."

■ SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITY

The Bureau Goes To San Juan

OSHA DAVIDSON

San Juan, Puerto Rico

A massive campaign of illegal surveillance and harassment has been carried out for decades against Puerto Ricans (who are U.S. citizens) by a law enforcement agency with close links to both the Federal Bureau of Investigation and anti-Castro terrorists. The campaign, waged by the Intelligence Division (I.D.) of the Puerto Rico Police Department, was originally aimed at members of the Puerto Rican independence movement, known here on the island as *independentistas*; but eventually it grew to include more than 150,000 environmentalists, student leaders, feminists, labor union leaders and antinuclear protesters, as well as professors, lawyers, journalists, writers and artists suspected of harboring "leftist sentiments." It is by far the largest domestic intelligence-gathering operation, legal or illegal, run by a non-Federal agency in the history of the United States.

Although the I.D. was officially disbanded in 1987 and the practice of investigating individuals not suspected of a crime has been ordered stopped by Governor Rafael Hernández Colón, Puerto Rico police continue to use the I.D.'s 16,557 files and 135,188 note cards, which contain information on citizens and groups investigated solely because of their ideology. The fate of the controversial files and note cards will be decided by the Puerto Rico Supreme Court.

The existence of the files came to light on June 15, 1987. William Colón Berrios, a former I.D. policeman serving a jail term for the 1978 execution-style slaying of two *independentistas* on a remote mountaintop called Cerro Maravilla, said in a radio interview that the I.D. maintained files on "subversives and separatists" that list even the Chief of Police. Two weeks later, the socialist newspaper *Claridad* printed a list of 998 individuals and groups that its anonymous source alleged were the subject of I.D. investigations. The list read like a sampling of the island's intellectual and political elite. While the police denied that the *Claridad* roll was authentic, they admitted that the files described by Colón Berrios did in fact exist. Public outcry was fierce and immediate.

The practice of political surveillance on the island goes back to the turn of the century. Soon after the United States seized Puerto Rico in the Spanish-American War, it felt the need to root out those Puerto Ricans who were anything less than enthusiastic about the idea of North American rule. A secret police report dated February 1900 concerning an islandwide inventory of alleged subversive activity gives an

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indication of how broadly the authorities here have always defined "subversive." The report notes that "on Washington's birthday, no American flag was raised in Utuado [a town in central Puerto Rico] until eleven o'clock."

While various government agencies (including the F.B.I. and several branches of military intelligence) continued to create files and lists of suspected *independentistas*, the practice emerged in its present form during World War II with the creation of the Bureau of Internal Security (renamed the Intelligence Division in the 1950s), which was set up as an appendage to the F.B.I. within the Puerto Rico Police Department and was also responsible for tracking draft resisters.

For the first half of this century there was in fact a sizable movement in Puerto Rico that supported armed struggle as a means of achieving independence from the United States, primarily members of the Nationalist Party under the radical leader Pedro Albizu Campos. But that violent group was silenced by a brutal campaign waged by the F.B.I. and the I.D. in the late 1950s. Since that time, tiny groups such as the Armed Forces for National Liberation (F.A.L.N.) and the Macheteros (who are now on trial in Connecticut for the 1983 robbery of a Wells Fargo depot), have sought independence through force. The F.B.I. and the insular police, however, have continued to subject all *independentistas*, violent or nonviolent, to the same harsh treatment.

After the well-documented abuses of the F.B.I.'s counterintelligence program Cointelpro, of which the pro-independence Puerto Rican Socialist Party was a major target, Congress attempted to rein in the Bureau in the mid-1970s. It then fell to the I.D. to gather information on *independentistas* and their sympathizers. The division, which was trained by and maintained close ties with the F.B.I., carried out its mandate with a vengeance. I.D. of-

ficers boasted that within two weeks of someone's putting a sticker of the Puerto Rican flag (generally associated with the independence movement) on the bumper of his or her car, the division would have opened a file on the individual.

The I.D., headquartered in San Juan, had about a dozen field officers throughout the island and was divided into six divisions: labor, aliens, explosives, job applications (used to investigate prospective police officers), specialists (who worked undercover) and clandestine (which investigated violent subversive groups).

Division agents would attend *independentista* political rallies, labor union picket lines and antinuclear meetings to get the names of as many of those present as possible, often tracking individuals from the license plate numbers of cars parked at "suspicious" events. Each name would then be written on a 3 x 5 note card. After three such listings, the I.D. would open a file on the individual. If the division considered that person a mild threat, it would simply add material to the file whenever something came to its attention. But for thousands of individuals, the I.D. actively sought out information, often with ludicrous attention to detail. Garbage was searched and a list of the contents put into the file. Any car parked in front of the subject's house, any identified visitor to his or her home or office resulted in a new name on another index card. In this way, the list of "subversives and separatists" quickly grew.

Since all efforts by the targets of police surveillance to see their files have been thwarted by the government, it is impossible to say conclusively how the information gathered was used on a case-by-case basis. Yamil Suárez, executive director of the Civil Rights Commission of Puerto Rico, which held hearings about the files a year ago, says that he himself was denied a judicial appointment because of information in his file. Suárez recalled, "They confronted me with a file gathered by the police, containing a picture of me at an antinuclear march. Of course I didn't get the appointment."

Almost every *independentista* has a similar story of a job lost, tenure denied or travel visa withheld for reasons that were never clear. When a telephone conversation is cut off or there are strange noises on the line, it is assumed that the phone is tapped. "Estoy fichado" (I'm listed) has for years been a grim half-joke.

"That's part of the problem with being on the list," says civil rights lawyer Charles Hey Maestre, whose name was included in the one printed by *Claridad*. "You never know how it's used against you. Maybe you lost a job because your boss simply didn't like you; maybe because you're on the list. And you certainly never know about the job offers that didn't materialize. I'm concerned about my children. Does the teacher know that these are the children of a 'listed person'? How does she relate to them because of that? It's so easy to become paranoid."

Only a thin line separates paranoia from reality on this Caribbean island. Despite the Puerto Rican Constitution's explicit prohibition against government wiretapping, during the Macheteros trial it was revealed that the F.B.I., which maintains a field office in San Juan, does indeed record conversations on island phones. It is also a fact that the two



young *independentistas* executed by the I.D. officers at Cerro Maravilla were included in the subversive and separatist files—just like 150,000 other Puerto Ricans.

What exactly was the F.B.I.'s role in the scandal? Harry Brandon, F.B.I. special agent in charge in San Juan, denied in a telephone interview that the Bureau had any knowledge of the I.D.'s practice of compiling files on individuals solely for political reasons, but that assertion is contradicted by numerous people close to the case.

According to former Watergate prosecutor Sam Dash, who has worked for the past several years as special counsel to the president of the Puerto Rico Senate, "The local F.B.I. worked very closely with the I.D. As a matter of fact, there is evidence that they were constantly using those files. I have no doubt that the F.B.I. was aware of them and had access to them."

That view is confirmed by former superintendent of the Puerto Rico Police Department Astol Calero, who helped organize the Bureau of Internal Security during World War II. "There was a flow of information from the Police Department to the F.B.I. He who denies that the F.B.I. was involved [in the subversive and separatist files] is lying," Calero told me in an interview at his home.

A high-ranking Puerto Rican government official who requested anonymity also confirmed that the F.B.I. had access to the files in question. "We have documents proving that the F.B.I. went into those files. In fact, it was a systematic, frequent function of the F.B.I. in Puerto Rico," he said. So the F.B.I. knew that the I.D. was keeping files on people solely because of their ideology? "That's right," said the official. These charges undercut F.B.I. Director William Sessions's recent claim that the Bureau's controversial CISPES investigation (in which the F.B.I. for years spied on members of the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador) was an aberration.

"I cannot emphasize too strongly my firm conviction that there is no place for such mistakes in the work of the F.B.I.," Sessions told the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in September. But the Bureau had apparently known about and used the illegally maintained Puerto Rican files for decades, suggesting that the CISPES investigation represents a widespread and longstanding pattern of F.B.I. abuse.

There was another regular user of the files: an anti-Castro Cuban exile named Antonio de la Cova, who was convicted of taking part in the attempted bombing of a Miami bookstore in 1976 and who settled in San Juan after he was released from prison in 1982. Answering questions during the October 1987 Civil Rights Commission hearings, de la Cova, a leader of the anti-Castro community in San Juan, denied allegations by Carmelo Meléndez, head of the I.D. at its closure, that he had "free rein" at the department.

In a recent telephone interview, however, de la Cova, who publishes the right-wing magazine *La Crónica*, said such physical access was unnecessary. "Many cops in the I.D. left with their own copies of files—and photographs. And if they feel comfortable with a reporter they'll share the information. You don't have to go up to the division and go into

a locked room. There are always other ways to get information. You know that."

During the Civil Rights Commission hearings, it emerged that de la Cova had contributed information to the files, conducting his own twenty-four-hour stakeouts of other members of the Cuban community in Puerto Rico and handing reports over to I.D. agent Enio Serrano, who filed them without noting their source. "It's unbelievable that a convicted terrorist had that kind of access to police files," said Yamil Suárez of the Civil Rights Commission.

There is reason to believe that de la Cova has links, at least indirectly, to the F.B.I. Seeking information on de la Cova, I filed requests for documents under the Freedom of Information Act with the F.B.I.'s San Juan office. The request was denied by the Bureau, citing privacy restrictions. When I first called de la Cova for an interview his response was, "Oh, you're the guy who filed the F.O.I.A. request on me." After initially refusing to comment on how he knew, he later hinted, "I still have sources that worked in [police] intelligence. I'm not going to ask those people where they got their information."

When F.B.I. special agent in charge Harry Brandon was asked if the San Juan office was de la Cova's source, Brandon answered, "No, that's statutory. We're not allowed to do that. I'm mystified. That doesn't happen."

It is now up to the Puerto Rico Supreme Court to determine the fate of the files. In September 1987, a lower court judge ruled that the government must turn over all files and note cards to the victims of the illegal investigations. The government appealed the decision, requesting that the Supreme Court instead approve the appointment of a commission made up of the superintendent of police, the secretary of justice and three former Supreme Court justices to determine what to do with the files.

Many people see this delay in settling the issue as politically motivated. "It's important to resolve the case before the [November] elections," said Independence Party Representative David Noriega (whose name appears on the *Claridad* list). Otherwise, he said, people will not have all the information available on which to base their votes. The ruling Popular Democratic Party of Governor Hernández Colón is strongly favored to win re-election.

The current scandal may escalate once the files are made public—if the high court decides to release them. Hundreds, if not thousands, of lawsuits are expected to be filed by citizens who were illegally spied on and harassed for years.

Perhaps the most significant implication of the affair to Puerto Ricans themselves is in how it relates to the island's status vis-à-vis the United States. For years, American presidents, Democrats and Republicans alike, have maintained that Puerto Rico is free to choose the relationship with the United States that it wants, be it statehood, independence or a continuation of the present anomalous status as a "Free Associated State." But the suppression of the independence movement, which is the thread running through this whole shoddy affair, and the F.B.I.'s complicity in that effort suggest that the fate of the world's oldest colony still resides, as it has since 1898, not in San Juan but in Washington. □