

Did ADL try to impede San Francisco probe?

by Jeffrey Steinberg

A West Coast newsletter on Middle East affairs has published excerpts of a pair of Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL) internal documents that suggest that even after police raided ADL offices and carted off incriminating evidence of illegal spying, League officials attempted to stymie the criminal probe using informants inside police departments.

The Feb. 25, 1993 memorandum, which ADL officials have confirmed was a genuine League document, was written by Civil Rights Division head Jeffrey Sinensky and Community Services Division chief Ann Tourk, and was addressed to the ADL's 30-odd regional directors. The memo stated in part: "We are aware that the San Francisco Police Department has written to several law enforcement jurisdictions throughout the country advising them that material from their departments has been found in files gathered in connection with the Gerard investigation. [Former San Francisco police officer Tom Gerard is scheduled for a hearing on July 23 to determine if his case will be sent before a jury—ed.] This letter has not been shared with us, and so it is unclear whether the letter refers to files found at Gerard's home, ADL files, or other material. We do know that the SFPD contacted the Phoenix and Portland police departments and other unknown jurisdictions. . . .

"You should be aware that your local law enforcement may have received such a letter; do not make any independent inquiries regarding that correspondence. If, however, you learn of any contact by the SFPD in your area, please let us know."

In one of the depositions released to the public by the San Francisco Police Department on April 8, 1993, former ADL fact-finding department employee David Gurvitz described the ADL's internal "coded language" for transmitting instructions and conveying information illegally obtained from official sources, including police officers. According to Gurvitz, who was fired by the ADL after he was caught soliciting a violent attack against an employee of the rival Wiesenthal Center by white supremacists, ADL documents referred to material illegally obtained from government officials as "information from our official friends."

While the Feb. 25 memo did not overtly instruct ADL

regional offices to interfere in the San Francisco police probe, several sources close to the ADL have indicated that this memo triggered the first phase of the League's "damage control" effort to stymie the SFPD investigation.

Damage control in the black community

Another priority target of ADL "damage control" was the black community, especially civil rights organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Shortly after the release of 800 pages of investigative material, including a list of 950 groups spied upon by the ADL, League officials put out another memo, instructing their regional offices to launch a "fence mending" outreach to the NAACP in particular.

The May 5, 1993 memo was penned by Ann Tourk and Charney Bromberg, the ADL's director of Intergroup Relations. This memo read in part: "Many of you have already reached out to local branches of the NAACP; those of you who have not done so, particularly where you have a personal relationship with the local director, should do so now.

"The contact should be for the purpose of 'touching base' but clearly, if the topic of San Francisco arises, your response should be quite direct—'You know we're in the business of monitoring extremists, not our friends in the civil rights movement.'

"We're most interested in getting a picture of how this issue is playing among your intergroup contacts and coalition partners. Please call to give us your assessment—good, bad or indifferent."

Spying on Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

ADL officials were painfully aware by early May, when the initial results of the San Francisco spy probe began to circulate among political layers from coast to coast, that they had a big problem. One former ADL employee, Henry Schwarzschild, now with the American Civil Liberties Union, had come forward to reveal that he had quit the League after he discovered that the group was spying on Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., whom the ADL considered "sort of a loose cannon. He was a Baptist preacher and nobody could be quite sure what he would do next. The ADL was very anxious about having an unguided missile out there."

To compound matters, the *Village Voice*, a widely read New York City left-of-center news weekly, has recently published its second lengthy article on the ADL's spying activities in its July 27 edition. The piece, by Robert I. Friedman, exposes the ADL's role in attempting to impose strict censorship on American libraries and universities that make available reading material on the Middle East. Friedman reports that the Chicago Police Department is conducting a serious probe of ADL spying in the Midwest, paralleling the San Francisco probe, which is expected to result in indictments against some ADL officials before the end of the summer.