

Presser indictment spotlights FBI crimes

by Jeffrey Steinberg

The "surprise" announcement on May 17 that a Cleveland, Ohio federal grand jury had indicted International Brotherhood of Teamsters president Jackie Presser on charges he embezzled the funds of two unions through "ghost employee" schemes sent shockwaves through the corridors of the FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C.

As the result of the Presser indictment, which had been stalled for over a year, one FBI supervisor agent, Robert S. Friedrich, the head of the organized crime squad in the Cleveland FBI office, was also indicted in Washington. Friedrich was charged in a five-count indictment with lying under oath to federal investigators in order to block the prosecution of the IBT boss. Friedrich had claimed that he had authorized Presser to pay the no-show employees as part of Presser's informant work for FBI "penetrating" organized-crime circles in the Midwest. According to the indictments, no such order was given—by Friedrich or any other FBI official. The coverup was worked out after the fact in a series of meetings between FBI officials and Presser's lawyers through the summer of 1985, once it became clear that Presser's affair with the FBI and the mob was running out of steam and threatening to expose a 25-year FBI crusade to wreck the nation's largest and once most powerful trade union.

Presser, it now seems, has been an FBI informant for the past 14 years, working to destroy the very union that has just elected him to a five-year term as international president. Presser came in as IBT president after Roy Williams, the last elected union chief, was stripped of his position on being convicted of racketeering.

Despite media efforts to direct all of the attention of the Presser-Friedrich indictments at the Teamster president's crime ties and the pomp and circumstance of the union convention that opened on May 19 in Las Vegas, top officials of the FBI and Department of Justice, including FBI number-two man and would-be director Oliver Ravel and DOJ Organized Crime and Racketeering Section chief David Margolis, were scrambling to assess the damage to the FBI and its army of informants.

"After all," as one former intelligence officer with long-time ties to the FBI told *EIR*, "the FBI is nothing beyond its

informants program. What does it say to those informants who have been involved in crimes far more serious than those of Presser to see such a biggie fall? And that's not to even mention the fact that the FBI agent was indicted. The entire underpinning of the FBI's corrupt informant system—and its most rotten component, the Federal Witness Protection Program—is on the ropes. Presser had been given solid promises by Justice that he would never be indicted as long as he played ball with the FBI."

According to that source, many more heads may roll at FBI headquarters on Pennsylvania Avenue before the smoke clears on the Presser matter.

One estimate says that at least 26 FBI special agents could be indicted for their collusion with Mel Weinberg, the government's top crook in the Abscam "stings" of the late 1970s, who carried out a liberal amount of extracurricular thievery while on the federal pad to the tune of nearly a million tax-free dollars. Based on the Presser-Friedrich precedent, all 26, along with Weinberg, could go to jail.

In another case that already has major media networks hot on the trail, the FBI has been shielding a suspected three-time murderer, Michael Raymond, from a Broward County, Florida grand jury while he serves as the Bureau's top sting agent in municipal corruption cases in New York City and Chicago.

The Washington, D.C. federal grand jury that handed down the true bill against Friedrich on May 15 has not yet run out its calendar. Justice Department sources acknowledged that at least two other FBI special agents from the Cleveland office, Martin McCann and Patrick Foran, who worked with Friedrich on the Presser team, are possible candidates for similar indictments. And DoJ official Margolis was the author of at least one letter prematurely ordering the dropping of indictment plans against Presser by the Cleveland grand jury.

Cointelpro lives

While the Presser-Friedrich indictments were striking a possible death blow to the hideously corrupt FBI informants system—which led the FBI into a virtual marriage with the worst drug-trafficking elements of organized crime—it was also drawing long-suppressed attention to the fact that the FBI never dropped its "political enemies list" operations, the most notorious of which bore the name Cointelpro.

Now, according to documents released under the Freedom of Information Act, it appears that the FBI was running an ongoing Cointelpro-modeled effort to undercut the political influence of the Teamsters, under the code name Probex. Probex apparently included a strong FBI assist to the Teamster dissident movement—and the advancing of Presser into the union's top spot. If this doesn't make Jackie Presser the first union president to be installed through an FBI dirty trick aimed at controlling the union, it certainly makes him the most powerful.