

News media were Starr's informants

by Edward Spannaus

Court papers filed by independent counsel Kenneth Starr show that Starr's partnership with the news media is even worse than originally thought. In his famous "Pressgate" article, editor Steve Brill had described certain reporters as "lapdogs" and "stenographers" for the independent counsel, virtually taking dictation from Starr and his deputies, and then feeding it out to the public as "news."

Now, it is revealed that Starr was not just secretly giving confidential information to the news media, but members of the news media were also giving confidential information to Starr, for his use in investigations and prosecutions.

The latest disclosures were found in court papers unsealed on Aug. 7, in the contempt-of-court proceedings now under way against the independent counsel in Federal court in Washington. In court papers filed in late June or July, when he was trying to block a scheduled court hearing on his leaks to the news media, Starr argued that he could not disclose evidence about his office's contacts with reporters "without revealing confidential investigative information." To support his argument, Starr cited a 1981 case on "informer's privilege," that allows the government to keep secret the identity of an informant who provides information about criminal activities, in order to protect the informant from possible retribution.

"Long recognized at common law, the informer's privilege serves important individual and societal interests in protecting the anonymity of citizens who cooperate in law enforcement," Starr wrote in his legal argument as to why he should not be forced to hand over information regarding his contacts with reporters.

Associated Press cites legal sources as saying that Starr specifically wanted to keep confidential, information received from reporters, as well as the identities of the reporters.

One sure-fire candidate to be at the top of Starr's snitchlist would be *Newsweek's* Michael Isikoff, who orchestrated the entrapment of Monica Lewinsky by Linda Tripp and Lucianne Goldberg. Good candidates would also be reporters or editors of the *Wall Street Journal* and the *American Spectator*, who have frequently met with Starr and his friends at the home of Starr's longtime friend and former Justice Department official, Theodore Olson.

Cointelpro revived

The Justice Department and the FBI have a long history of using the news media as "confidential sources."

This was a principal tactic used by the Justice Department during the 1980s targetting and frame-up of Lyndon LaRouche, carried out under the putative authority of Executive Order No. 12333, put into effect during the Reagan-Bush administration in 1981. Numerous reporters came together in a series of meetings known as the "Train Salon," in the New York apartment of financier John Train, in an operation financed by Richard Mellon Scaife. Out of those meetings, reporters such as NBC producer Pat Lynch and LaRouche-watcher Dennis King, went out and gathered intelligence and recruited witnesses for the government. In return, they were provided with leaks about every activity of the grand juries and the prosecution.

Similarly, FBI documents show the probability that a Virginia *Loudoun Times-Mirror* reporter and Mira Lansky Boland of the Washington office of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL) had official "confidential informant" status with the Virginia Attorney General, and possibly other agencies.

The Church report

This goes back even further. The 1976 Church Committee Report on Intelligence Activities detailed how the FBI and Justice Department used "friendly media" to spread black propaganda against their political targets—something the media, in high indignation, have sworn they would never do again. These "friendly media" were considered to be confidential sources. The Report stated:

"Much of the Bureau's propaganda efforts involved giving information or articles to media sources who could be relied upon not to reveal the Bureau's interests. . . . Field offices also had 'confidential sources' (unpaid Bureau informants) in the media, and were able to ensure cooperation. The Bureau's use of the news media took two different forms: placing unfavorable articles and documentaries about targeted groups, and leaking derogatory information intended to discredit individuals."

From December 1963 until his death in 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. was the target of an intensive campaign by the FBI to "neutralize" him as an effective civil rights leader, which included use of news media sources. The Church Committee Report documented the use of a number of prominent reporters and editors in Cointelpro (counter-intelligence program) operations against Dr. King, including the active fomenting of dissension within the civil rights movement itself. Included was a covert campaign, conducted through the news media, to prevent Jimmy Hoffa and the Teamsters union from supporting Dr. King. The FBI even used the media to publicly castigate King for not staying at the black-owned and -patronized Lorraine Hotel during his initial visit to Memphis during the sanitation workers' strike, and for instead staying at the white-owned Holiday Inn. Dr. King did stay at the Lorraine Hotel during his next visit to Memphis—where he was shot and killed.