

From MLK to Today – FBI Attacks Peace and Justice Activists

Martin Luther King, Jr. is a universally recognized symbol of the struggle for civil rights for Black people. His *I Have a Dream* speech is considered one of the most important speeches of the 20th century — a powerful statement for basic equality and against racism and discrimination that resonated around the world. When he was alive, Martin Luther King was loved and respected by millions of people in the U.S. and around the world. Now he's even more respected.

What many people don't know is that while King was organizing his campaigns for civil and human rights, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) actively worked to undercut, discredit, isolate, and frighten him. This is documented from the FBI's own internal documents. When we see how the FBI treated somebody as dedicated to non-violence and peace as the widely revered Martin Luther King, it makes clear that the FBI is not a 'non-political' agency just fighting against people engaged in crime, violence or terror. On the contrary, it's a highly political agency that has continually targeted progressive movements working for social change.

The FBI's Targeting of Martin Luther King

The FBI began to monitor Martin Luther King in 1955 with his involvement in the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In 1964, King expressed frustration with the FBI's unwillingness or inability to prevent harm to civil rights activists working in the deep South and to enforce the laws that supposedly existed guaranteeing equality. King's mere questioning why the FBI wasn't able to enforce the law in the South outraged Director J. Edgar Hoover, who responded with one of many of his public attacks on King.

The FBI repeatedly crossed the line from surveillance into direct harassment and threats to King. For example, the FBI sent an anonymous letter to King in 1964 which said, "You are a colossal fraud and an evil, vicious one at that." The letter went on to say, "The American public ... will know you for what you are -- an evil, abnormal beast," and "Satan could not do more." The letter gave the ominous threat, "King, you are done," then ended with this: "King, there is only one thing left for you to do. You know what it is ... You better take it before your filthy, abnormal fraudulent self is bared to the nation."

The FBI's targeting and attacks against King from 1955 until after his assassination in 1968 is something that should never be forgotten. Their attacks on King were illegal and outrageous. Unfortunately they were not unique — they were in a context of much broader FBI attacks on all progressive movements. In that period the sharpest FBI attacks were against Black, Native American, Chicano, Puerto Rican and Asian movements, in particular the FBI COINTELPRO that targeted the Black Panther Party and others, as well as the anti-war and student movement. But FBI harassment of progressive movements didn't end with the 1960s.

FBI attacks continued post-MLK

FBI attacks continued in the 1970s against groups targeted in the 60s as well as labor and socialist activists. In the 1980s international solidarity activists were targeted with the largest FBI investigation in history against the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES). After 7 years of investigating CISPES the FBI came up with nothing, but in the process violated the rights and endangered the lives of many people.

In the current context, the FBI has focused much of its energy on investigations and harassment under the guise of "anti-terrorism." The brunt of these attacks in the post-911 era have been against Arab, Muslim and Palestinian people.

In September 2010 the Justice Department's Inspector General issued a report admitting the FBI "improperly spied on American activists involved in First Amendment-protected activities and mischaracterized nonviolent civil disobedience as terrorism which improperly placed activists on terrorist watch lists."

We are now seeing rapidly increasing FBI attacks on anti-war and international solidarity activists, also under the guise of "anti-terrorism" in the Midwest. The FBI's investigations had lead to 23 activists being subpoenaed to testify at a grand jury to be interrogated about their peace activism. These modern-day FBI attacks are a continuation of the FBI's ongoing practice of trying to discredit and stop any movements for social change.

Since they thrive on secrecy and fear, we need to boldly expose and work to stop the FBI's repressive actions, as we continue to speak out and build the movements for social justice. Doing both of those things is the best way to fully honor the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.



➔ **TAKE ACTION!** ❶ Go to stopfbi.net for information about how the FBI is attacking the modern day peace movement in the US. ❷ Call Attorney General Holder at 202-353-1555 and demand that the FBI stop investigating peace and justice groups. Tell him that he should call off the grand jury investigation in Chicago of peace & solidarity activists. ❸ Sign our petition at: www.stopfbi.net/petition

COMMITTEE TO STOP FBI REPRESSION ➔ 612-379-3585 ➔ STOPFBI.NET