

Deadline to obtain notorious Red Squad data near

By TOM LONERGAN

Political activists who were trailed by Michigan State Police during the 1950s, '60s and '70s have one week left to get copies of their surveillance files.

Jan. 15 is the last day State Police will accept requests for files kept as long as 25 years by the now-defunct "Red Squad," created by the Michigan Legislature in 1950.

Separate circuit court opinions in Wayne County in 1977 and Ingham County in 1978 declared the Red Squad unconstitutional and led to the release procedure. An estimated 38,000 individual and 400 organization files were illegally maintained by the state police between 1950 and 1974.

The state was used in 1974 by a number of Detroit-area consumer, civil rights, anti-Vietnam war and welfare rights activists. The United Auto Workers (UAW) later joined the class-action suit.

STATE POLICE will accept only special, pre-printed request forms from file applicants, Lt. Norman Smith said this week.

"No phone calls, plain letters, post cards or matchbook covers," he added. "Because of the volume of this, we had to set up a system. That's the system."

The Detroit Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, also a party in the suit, and the UAW have been providing file request forms to individuals and organizations since mid-November.

That month, state police sent first class mail notices to some 33,500 individuals and organizations listed in the

files. But 17,000 of those notices were not delivered, Smith said. Another 6,000 file subjects never received notices because the state police lacked complete addresses.

"JUST BECAUSE there are 38,000 names doesn't mean there are 38,000 files," Smith said.

As of Monday, he said, 5,600 file requests had been received by the state police. No special publicity is planned to notify people of the Jan. 15 deadline. Daily newspaper ads were published twice in November as notification of the file release procedure.

The lawyers' guild has been swamped with phone calls about the files, said Lenore Goldman, a coordinator of the group's political surveillance project.

"Oh, gosh, we get easily 25 to 30 calls a day," she said. In the past two months the group has mailed "a couple thousand" file request forms, she added. The phone number is 963-0843.

Jordan Rossen of the UAW's legal department said file request forms were distributed to all of the union's regional offices. Former or current UAW members who want to make a file request should contact their nearest regional office, he said.

TARGETS OF Red Squad surveillance ranged from those active in the trade union, civil rights, anti-war, women's and other movements of the late 1950s and '1960s to non-participants, Goldman said.

Other possible file targets, according to Goldman, were persons who signed petitions supporting third party candidates to appear on election ballots, and newspaper letter-to-the-editor writers on busing, "either pro or con."

"Anyone who was outspoken or clearly exercised their First Amendment rights" could have a file, she said. Rossen said the last 10 years of the state Red Squad files "include almost nothing but newspaper clippings" on the UAW. "They could have found more in our public relations files," he said.

In earlier years, Red Squad files were kept on individuals attending un-

ion meetings, Rossen added.

SMITH ESTIMATED it would take the state police "a little over a year" to respond to file requests. Four full-time state police employees will do the processing, he said.

File copies will be duplicates of what the state police has on microfilm, with this exception: Information that would lead to the identification of informers and undercover agents will be deleted.

Also deleted, Smith said, will be names of third persons who appear with information of a "highly personal nature" about the person. Information

Release of the files could be interrupted by the FBI, which may seek a state or federal court order preventing release of FBI information or FBI-furnished material in the files.

about an ongoing criminal investigation will be deleted, as well.

According to the notice which the state police published in several daily newspapers in November, "The files

exist only on film and will ultimately be destroyed. No duplicate will be maintained."

Smith said the release procedure will cost the state about \$350,000.

RELEASE OF the files, however, could be interrupted by the FBI, which last month contacted the Michigan Attorney General's office. Assistant Attorney General George Weller, who has represented the state in the Red Squad case, said the FBI may seek a state or federal court order preventing release of FBI information or FBI-furnished material in the files.

"They're saying, 'Look and see

what's there first before it's let out," Weller said.

The suit against police political surveillance has also led to a release procedure of an estimated 60,000 files kept by the city of Detroit police since the 1930s.

The city was recently ordered by retired Wayne County Circuit Judge James Montante to notify individuals and organizations listed in the files. The notices are to be mailed in early May.

The lawyers' guild will continue to provide state file request forms up to the Jan. 15 deadline.

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