

After 25 Years, FBI Releases Last Ten Documents in John Lennon FBI File

LOS ANGELES – The FBI late Tuesday made public 10 documents from their files on John Lennon that have been withheld for 25 years under the claim that releasing them could cause "military retaliation against the United States."

The files, however, contain only well known information about Lennon's ties to New Left leaders and antiwar groups in London in 1970 and 1971.

"I doubt that Tony Blair's government will launch a military strike on the US in retaliation for the release of these documents," said Jon Wiener, a historian at the University of California at Irvine, who first requested the files in 1981. "Today we can see that the national security claims the FBI has been making for 25 years were absurd from the beginning. The Lennon FBI file is a classic case of excessive government secrecy."

The documents, which have been posted at www.LennonFBIfiles.com:

- Describe an interview with Lennon published in 1971 in *The Red Mole*, a London underground newspaper, in which, according to the document: "Lennon emphasized his proletarian background and his sympathy with the oppressed and underprivileged people of Britain and the world."

- State Lennon promised to help "finance a left wing bookshop and reading room in London," and that Lennon and his wife Yoko Ono had signed an appeal in support of Cambodian Prince Sihanouk, a neutralist, at the time Cambodia was invaded by the United States.

- Conclude that Lennon had "apparently resisted the attempts of any particular group to secure any hold over him."

- State "Lennon has encouraged the belief that he holds revolutionary views...by the content of some of his songs." This appears to be a reference to Lennon's song "Power to the People."

"The release of these final documents, concealed from public view for nearly a quarter of a century, reveals government paranoia at a pathological level and an attempt to shield executive branch abuse of civil liberties under the rubric of national security," said Mark Rosenbaum, legal director for the ACLU of Southern California. "They show that the only military secrets protected were revelations about Nixon and J. Edgar Hoover's war against John Lennon for his lawful dissent. Our government jeopardizes the national security when it treats as the enemy a rock musician and his lyrics about peace."

The FBI had withheld the files on the grounds that they contained "national security information provided by a foreign government under an explicit promise of confidentiality." The name of the foreign government remains classified, although it has been widely reported that Britain's MI-5 intelligence agency had a file on Lennon which contained information like that released by the FBI today.

Wiener originally filed suit in 1983, represented by the ACLU of Southern California and attorney Dan Marmalefsky of Morrison & Foerster. Marmalefsky said: "From the beginning the FBI treated John Lennon as if it were a crime to sing 'Give peace a chance.' This case shows how our government exploits the claim of national security to shield itself from political embarrassment, subverting the First Amendment and the Freedom of Information Act."

Most of the 300 pages in the Lennon FBI file were released to Wiener in 1997 in a settlement with the Clinton administration. Those documents were published in Wiener's book *Gimme Some Truth: The John Lennon FBI File*, and were featured in the documentary "The U.S. vs. John Lennon," which opened in September.

But 10 documents had remained classified on the grounds that they contained "national security information provided by a foreign government." The Bureau told the courts in 1983 that release of those documents "can reasonably be expected to inter alia: lead to foreign diplomatic, economic and military retaliation against the United States."

U.S. District Court Judge Robert K. Takasugi had rejected the FBI's claims in 2004 and ordered the documents released. In 2005 the FBI announced it would appeal that order. Today's release of documents ends the litigation.

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