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In 1972, CIA sensed intrigue in the city

## Group was watched as GOP convention loomed

By Michael Stetz  
UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

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SAN DIEGO – So what's America's Finest City doing in a decades-old CIA document that includes John Lennon, the Communist Chinese, and the World Assembly for Peace and Independence of the Peoples of Indochina?

Flash back to 1972. The Republican National Convention was slated to come to town. And the CIA was worried about disruptions, according to heavily censored documents the agency released last week.

- [Documentation: CIA's 'Family Jewels' paper](#) (PDF)

Known by some in the CIA as the “family jewels,” the papers offer insight into the agency's workings in the 1960s and '70s. Five pages are devoted to San Diego, which, thanks to the convention, was bracing to be the epicenter of the weirdness of the times, with demonstrators expected to arrive in droves.

The CIA was monitoring a group called the San Diego Convention Coalition, organized to protest the convention and the continuing war in Vietnam. The agency wanted to see if the group had any foreign ties.

“The SDCC is planning for foreign support for its harassment of the Republican convention,” reads one CIA document, noting that the SDCC planned to, among other things, broadcast live calls from the Vietnamese in Paris.

Nobody involved in the SDCC from that time is shocked or amazed that the CIA was keeping tabs on the organization.

“Not at all,” said Peter Bohmer, then an economics teacher at San Diego State University and one of the SDCC's leaders.

A number of police agencies, both federal and local, were believed to have infiltrated the group, he noted. So why not the CIA?

“It was all pretty heavy,” said Bohmer, 63, who now teaches at

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Evergreen State College in Olympia, Wash.

Talk about heavy: Another activist, Georgy Katsiaficas, heard rumors of a government plot that called for activists to be kidnapped, taken to Mexico and castrated.

Although the SDCC was looking to organize a major protest against the convention, the activities were to be non-violent, Bohmer said. Still, memories of the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, which was marred by violence, were fresh in everyone's minds.

The SDCC had a couple hundred members and was drawing support from many of the top anti-war activists at the time, including former Beatle John Lennon.

“He was planning on coming,” Katsiaficas said.

Other major artists, including the Grateful Dead, were planning to make appearances as well, he said. “There was talk of whether we should hold some sort of political Woodstock,” said Katsiaficas, 58, who teaches at Wentworth Institute of Technology in Boston.

In the CIA documents, John Lennon is referred to as a “British subject” who was providing financial support to Rennie Davis, a well-known activist who had taken part in the Chicago protest. Davis planned to direct protests at this convention as well.

Months before the scheduled August convention, the scene in San Diego was tense and, yes, violent.

In January of that year, shots were fired into Bohmer's Ocean Beach home, wounding a woman, Paula Tharp. A right-wing organization called the Secret Army Organization was behind it, according to news accounts of the time.

But the drama surrounding San Diego and the convention soon unraveled – for the spooks as well as for the protesters. A scandal involving a corporate contribution forced a change in the convention's venue. It was moved to Miami, and the SDCC eventually dissolved.

As soon as San Diego lost the convention, the city fell off the CIA map.

According to the documents, the agency took its cloak-and-dagger ways and headed east, to start investigating possible disruptions in Miami.

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