Informer Says He Was Part of Coast Plot to Kill Cesar Chavez

BY EARL CALDWELL

SAN FRANCISCO, Jan. 1—

Despite the denials of Federal officials, an unemployed laundry worker was named in this city today as a paid police informer who insists that certain farmers in the San Joaquin Valley have plotted an assassination of Cesar Chavez, the farm union leader.

The informer, Larry Shears, 32, said that he was offered $5,000 to participate in the plot and that he had also agreed to pay off $30,000 to carry out the assassination.

Mr. Shears, a thin, long-haired man who lives in Berkeley, Calif., said he was offered $10,000 for information in the case. He was given several recordings and documents that he said demonstrated the veracity of his story.

Jerry Cohen, chief counsel to the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, has expressed concern for the safety of Mr. Chavez, who heads the union, and has said that he will seek a Congressional investigation.

Warned by Agents

Mr. Cohen said that last July 31, Federal agents warned the union that they had reason to believe an attempt to assassinate Mr. Chavez was being organized. On one occasion Federal agents were said to have provided protection for Mr. Chavez at a rally.

But last week, according to an Associated Press dispatch, a Federal spokesman said that the Government “now considers the case closed” after the informant was unable to provide any proof of a plot.

Mr. Chavez has been a controversial figure in his union’s long and bitter struggle to organize and raise the wages of workers on the huge California fruit and vegetable farms.

The investigation into the alleged assassination plot was carried out by the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Enforcement Division of the Internal Revenue Service, an arm of the Treasury Department.

Various officials of the enforcement division on the West Coast with whom Mr. Shears said he had dealings have declined to comment on the case and have referred inquiries to Washington.

On Thursday a revenue service spokesman in Washington declined comment on the case, saying, “IRS has an established policy of not commenting on investigations.”

Donald W. Bacon, a tax consultant with Gulf and Western Industries, who until November was Assistant Commissioner for Compliance at the revenue service, recalled that the segment had been an invasion.

He said: “At one time there was a threat to Chavez’s life. Some time in early fall. There was an alleged plot. I authorized payment of an amount of money that might have included payment to an informant. I understood the information wasn’t satisfactory and therefore he was not paid.”

He added, “The attempt never made on his life. The investigation was dropped.

Two key men named by Mr. Shears as participants in the alleged plot have been arrested on unrelated charges, and one is still in jail. Neither was charged with organizing an assassination. One was arrested on a narcotics charge and the other for murder.

Because there has been no official action against any of those mentioned by the informer, the names of alleged plot participants are withheld. Despite the arrests, leaders of the farm union are still worried.

Mr. Cohen said, “Maybe all we got was a reprieve. We still have people out there who put up a substantial sum of money. They could be looking for another hit man.”

Kennedy Pressed Fee

Mr. Cohen said that he had spent much time investigating the story related by Mr. Shears and had concluded that there were elements of truth in it. He said that Mr. Shears’ tapes and documents proved that he did work with the Federal agents and that the Government did authorize the payment of $10,000 to him for his role as an informant in the case.

It was also learned that Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, had been instrumental in getting the $10,000 fee approved for payment to Mr. Shears. The former Kennedy said that the money was to have been paid not out for his services as an informant and later as a witness but also to enable him to relocate his family outside California. He has a wife and two children.

Mr. Shears said that he never received the $10,000. He added, “I did not have a copy of a canceled check issued by the Treasury of the United States in the amount of $10,000.”

He also had a copy of a voucher showing that the payment had been made to his “information and evidence necessary to identify (name withheld) and those persons who are providing (name withheld) the funds to arrange the assign” and “murder of Cesar Chavez.”

The canceled check for $500, dated Oct. 4, 1971, was issued through the Royal Union National Bank of Alco, Tobacco and Firearms Enforcement Division.

Mr. Shears said that nearly three years ago he was without work at the time he was approached by the Kern County Sheriff’s Department as an informer. He said he was in a state of destitution and that he needed money to pay off a mortgage on his home.

He said that he worked with the department for a period of time and, because of his success, was then put in touch with the Bureau, with whose agents he subsequently worked.

The sheriff’s office confirmed that Mr. Shears had done work for it and said that his information had proved reliable.

Mr. Shears said that in late 1970, while he was working for the state agency, he came in touch with a man who was 35-year-old “hit” man who was wanted for murder by the State. The man was also wanted by the Federal Bureau, with whom agents he subsequently worked.

Suggests Burning Slide

Mr. Shears related that this person was involved in narcotics and that he planned to set this person up for an arrest that would have earned him $500 from the state.

As the relationship between the two developed, the contact man offered Mr. Shears a way to earn money, the informer said. He asked Mr. Shears if he would burn an amusement slide to permit the owner to collect insurance. Mr. Shears said that he declined the job but that the slide was later destroyed by fire.

In the early spring, he said, the contact man offered him $5,000 to burn some records in a blueprint office. He said that he questioned the contact man about the deal and learned that the records belonged to Mr. Chavez and that it was his office that were to be burned. In addition, the plan was to steal certain records from the union’s office and then make a “hit” on Mr. Chavez—that is, assassinate him.

“And I thought, ‘Whoa, God, and I know (name withheld) and I knew his people and his organization, and I knew he was capable of it,” Mr. Shears said.

Demand for Money

It was at about that point, Mr. Shears said, that he had been approached by the Alco, Tobacco and Firearms Enforcement Division and decided to contact it with the information about the assassination plot. Until that time, he said, he had had dealings with the division, he said.

Mr. Shears said that he made the contact with the division, told them what he knew and then, realizing that his identity as an informer would become known, demanded that they be relocated outside the state. He said that Mr. Vizard and Richard Cook, an agent assigned as his contact for the division, agreed to try to get him $10,000 and that a contract was drawn up.

Next, Mr. Shears said that the area chief of enforcement division, Melvin Vizard, was brought in. He said that Mr. Warner wanted him to take the names of Mr. Shears, the plot contact man and several others.

He said that the slide operators then became involved and called the payroll man, who they visited the contact man. The two decided that there was an informant in their midst and that Mr. Shears was in touch with the contact man.

The Informant Searched

Meanwhile, Mr. Shears said, he received from the contact man a small amount of money, which he handed to Mr. Vizard’s office and was told that it was the price of a 35-year-old “hit” man who was wanted for murder by the State. However, the contact man told him the hit man would himself arrange to get the money before the assassination took place.

Mr. Shears said that this aroused the interest of the Federal investigators, who specialized in that the Chavez files might contain “tax information on these farmers.”

Another delay occurred, he said, when the prospective hit man was picked up on the murder charges already pending against him. This man is still in jail and his case has not come to trial.

After several days, Mr. Shears went on, he called the man and told if the assassination was still on and was told, “The guy will be here Friday and the money to do the records.”

Man with Paper Bag

He said that when he arrived on Friday, though unexpected, he went to the contact man’s house but was told to wait outside. He said that he saw a man armed whom he identified as the son of a farmer in the valley area about 4 P.M. with a brown paper bag and out the. “The man is here,” he added. “And a decision to go—we still don’t have that decision.”

Mr. Shears said that a little later the contact man walked out of the house and told him, “The money is here,” but added, “The decision to go—we still don’t have that decision.”

Mr. Shears said that he did not know.

He said that on another occasion, involving the burning of the amusement slide, the same payoff man delivered the money to pay for the job. He also said that the owner of the slide, whom he described as a loan shark, was the man to whom the files had been sold.

From Mr. Chavez’s office were to be delivered.

Questioned by Police

Mr. Shears said that earlier the agents supplied him with a list of 10,000 names that enabled them to eavesdrop on his conversations with the contact man and to check the assassination plot. That, he said, enabled the agents to know that he wanted to be relocated.

The alleged assassination plot was its final stage when the amusement slide operation was picked up and questioned. He said that the change in the burning of the slide.

Mr. Shears said that information that the Kern County Sheriff’s Department had been passed to the Fresno police and that in questioning the slide operator, they dropped the Federal agents considered the plot investigation closed because men had been arrested—on unrelated charges. He said that the agents then told him that he was not going to be held and that he would be paid $500. He was promised. Rather, he said, that Mr. Vizard passed word to him that he was going to be paid only $500.

Officials of the farm union agreed with Mr. Shears in believing that all that may have been accomplished was delay an assassination attempt.

They said that in the recent months there were a number of arson attempts against various union projects that others have been riddled with bullet holes, and that at least two attempts were made to steal union records in the union offices.

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