

FBI Probes Mayor to Discredit Witness

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MONTPELIER — Less than 24 hours after Bernard Sanders was sworn in as mayor of Burlington, the FBI was on his trail.

Agent Fred List, badge in hand, walked into the office of the Vermont secretary of state Tuesday morning and demanded information on the new mayor's political past.

What the FBI agent was looking for had less to do with Sanders than with a New York court case, and what he found was about as interesting as a J. Edgar Hoover handkerchief.

Sanders, it seems, was mentioned last Friday in a multimillion-dollar civil suit in New York City. In the case, the Trotskyite Socialist Workers Party is suing the U.S. Department of Justice on charges that the government illegally harassed the party for years.

Jack Barnes, the national secretary of

the Socialist Workers Party, heralded Sanders' victory during testimony he gave.

"I don't believe a candidate of the Socialist Workers Party was elected in the sweep of campaigns we have run since 1929, although this year there are two exceptions," Barnes told the court.

One of those exceptions, he continued, was in Vermont, where "Bernard Sanders, who was one of the Socialist Workers Party's presidential electors in 1980, was just elected a mayor of Burlington..."

Sanders, although not a member of the Socialist Workers Party, did serve as an elector in Vermont for the party's 1980 presidential nominee, Andrew Pulley.

Edward Williams, an assistant U.S. attorney in New York who is handling the government's defense in the Socialist Workers Party trial, decided to check out Barnes' testimony to determine if his credibility as a witness could be challenged.

He asked the FBI, he said Tuesday, "to verify whether or not Bernard Sanders was a candidate of the Socialist Workers Party."

Sanders, an avowed leftist, has never run on the Socialist Workers Party ticket. He ran as an independent candidate for mayor this year, and in past, less successful elections, he campaigned as a member of Vermont's Liberty Union Party.

To alleviate any fears Sanders might have had about the FBI visit Tuesday, U.S. Attorney William Gray of Vermont notified the mayor he was not under investigation by the bureau.

That news was music to Sanders' ears. "After one day in office," the mayor beamed, "I am proud to announce that, like the mayors of San Francisco, Calif., Miami, Fla., and Montpelier, Vt., I, too, am not under investigation by the FBI."