

The FBI Calls on the Mediterranean Office

Rosemary Hoffmann (formerly Scholl)*
August, 2020

One afternoon in fall of 1979 when Wally Knoche and I were both in the office (usually one of us was traveling), we got a very polite call from an FBI agent asking if we were acquainted with one Dr. Phillippe Lannois. If so, could the FBI send a representative to our office — preferably the following morning — to discuss Dr. Lannois's employment with the University of Maryland European Division. Yes, 9:00 a.m. would be fine.

On the dot of 9:00, said representative appeared. Impeccably groomed, not a hair out of place, dressed in a dark brown suit, wrinkle-impervious yellow shirt with a tasteful tie that echoed the suit/shirt combination, brown (of course) shoes polished to mirror-quality. It was a wonder he even deigned to sit in our office armchair.

What had precipitated the FBI visit was a report from one of the students in Dr. Lannois's Government and Politics class that the professor had identified himself as a Palestinian. That was obviously a matter of concern in those early days of Middle East terrorism.

Files were requested and shown. Questions asked about the hiring procedure. Had we actually met Dr. Lannois in person? The questions began to be repetitious, and the clock was moving towards 10:00, which one would assume would be the limit of any such office visit.

Wally and I were getting desperate. How were we ever going to get rid of this investigator? We had assured him that we knew Dr. L. personally, both from office and field visits, that he had been teaching for us for over a year, PhD in History from the Sorbonne and on and on. There's only so much to be said. But no. The repetitious questions continued; the clock approached 11.

While Wally was talking, I took a good look at the investigator with an eye towards figuring out how to convince this man that his suspicions of our harboring a terrorist among our faculty were ill-placed. Obviously, logic and standard information were getting us nowhere.

When Wally finished talking, I reiterated that Dr. L. had come into the office on several occasions and (not previously disclosed) that he had impeccable manners and was always fastidiously dressed. Talk about a magic button!

Case closed. No further questions. Investigator thanked us for being so forthcoming and was gone in a flash. Why hadn't I thought to tell him that in the first place?

From January 1977 to February 1981, Wally Knoche was the Mediterranean Area Director and Rosemary Scholl Hoffmann, the Assistant Director.