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King Phone Tap Ordered by RFK

WASHINGTON—The question of whether Bobby Kennedy, when attorney general, ordered wide-scale wiretapping and eavesdropping by the FBI has become the subject of some controversy. It is also very important in gauging Kennedy's qualifications to be president, and whether he is telling the truth. After all, the matter of the credibility gap has become something of an issue these days.

In this connection, this column has learned that, when attorney general, Kennedy ordered a wiretap put on the phone of Dr. Martin Luther King.

Kennedy denies this and other statements that he ordered or condoned the wide-scale wiretapping or eavesdropping by the FBI while he commanded the Justice Department. He states that nowhere in the Justice Department is there to be found a single eavesdrop order signed by him.



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However, the facts in the eavesdropping of Dr. King are irrefutable and we can report them in detail.

ATTORNEY GENERAL Kennedy first ordered Dr. King bugged on July 16, 1963. His reason was that King was in touch with various Communists and was being influenced by them.

The order caused surprise in the FBI. During the 1960 election campaign both Bobby and his brother, the late President, had offered to help Dr. King when he was arrested in Atlanta Oct. 19 and refused to post bond in connection with a civil-rights sit-in.

John F. Kennedy even issued a press release offering to help King, a gesture which had important effect on the Negro vote three weeks later. In Cook County it was the Negro vote which gave Kennedy his slender 3,000 vote margin in Illinois and won him the presidency.

WHEN, THEREFORE, the brother of the President ordered a wiretap on Dr. King's phone, the FBI was amazed and opposed it. Courtney Evans, who served as liaison officer between J. Edgar Hoover and Bobby Kennedy, told the attorney general that King traveled a lot, so a wiretap might not be too effective. Also he said that the wiretap would have a bad reaction among Negroes if discovered. The attorney general remarked that he was not in the least interested in repercussions.

He did not press the matter, and so the FBI did not place any taps on King's wire in July, 1963.

However, in October of that year, Bobby Kennedy signed an order for a tap on King's wires, and thereafter King's phone conversations were monitored.

THIS MAY have been why the highly publicized confrontation between King and J. Edgar Hoover turned out the way it did.

On Nov. 18, 1964, Hoover called Dr. King "the most notorious liar in the country" after King had urged civil-rights workers not to report

violence to the FBI on the ground that FBI agents were Southerners who would take no action.

King hurried to Washington for a showdown with Hoover. Emerging from the FBI director's office after their conference, King made a statement surprisingly favorable to the FBI. He had no criticism for Hoover. Intimates have told us that King suspected Hoover was tapping his wires. However, King never realized that the person who originally ordered the monitoring was Robert F. Kennedy, the man who had offered to help get King out of jail. Later Kennedy was one of the most headlined mourners at King's funeral.

HOWEVER, WE can report that the FBI faithfully carried on Kennedy's original instructions and submitted regular reports on King's activities right up until the time of his death.

These dealt in part with a Communist who was helping to write King's speeches; in part with his sex life. They are considered of some importance now in trying to track down King's assassin.

One report written Feb. 20, 1968, quoted a confidential informant as claiming that Dr. King "has been having an illicit love affair with the wife of a prominent Negro dentist in Los Angeles since 1962."

"King calls this woman every Wednesday and meets her in various cities throughout the country."

"THE SOURCE related an incident which occurred some time ago in a New York City hotel, where King was intoxicated at a small gathering. King threatened to leap from the 13th floor window of the hotel if this woman would not say she loved him."

The wiretaps on King's phone also led to the reporting of King's movements around the country and various persons to whom he talked.

These have been checked out for enemies and those who might be interested in assassinating King. This was

why the FBI tracked down the lady reported in the Feb. 10 report and checked on the possibility that an irate husband might have sought revenge on King. The trail led up a blind alley. The husband was not the type who, if he knew, would harbor revenge.

The King wiretap was probably the most sensational of the taps inspired or ordered by Bobby Kennedy when he was attorney general, but it was by no means the only one. This phase of his government career has been scrutinized only casually in the past. However, the public has a right to know all of his record before voting on his qualifications to be president.