

28 The RFK-Pearson Dispute Over Dr. King

NEW YORK POST, FRIDAY, MAY 31, 1968

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LOS ANGELES—Sen. Robert F. Kennedy's campaign for the Democratic Presidential nomination is embroiled in charges by columnist Drew Pearson that Kennedy had ordered the late Dr. Martin Luther King's telephone tapped.

Pearson's accusation was not answered directly by Kennedy upon his arrival here this week. But his press secretary, Frank Mankiewicz, issued a statement saying that Kennedy had authorized wiretaps by the FBI only in certain "national security" cases.

Mankiewicz also asserted that Pearson was being "used" by J. Edgar Hoover, FBI director, in what he claimed was Hoover's "campaign" against Dr.

King.

In Washington, Pearson, a supporter of Vice President Humphrey's candidacy for the Democratic nomination, said he had what he described as a memo bearing Kennedy's signature, but did not say that it specifically authorized tapping Dr. King's telephone.

"I will produce convincing evidence in due time," said Pearson.

A member of Hoover's staff said in Washington that Hoover would have no comment to make on Mankiewicz' statement.

This is the sequence of events: Pearson said Kennedy had "ordered a wiretap put on the phone of Dr. Martin Luther King."

He also wrote that Kennedy, as Attorney General, first or-

dered Dr. King "bugged" on July 16, 1963. "Bugging" is the term used in referring to installation of electronic listening devices. Pearson said the reason for the alleged order was that King "was in touch with various Communists and was being influenced by them."

No taps were placed then on Dr. King's telephone, according to Pearson, but in October of 1963, "Kennedy signed an order for a tap on King's wires and thereafter King's phone conversations were monitored."

Pearson also wrote that the FBI submitted regular reports on Dr. King's activities until he was slain, and said one report, dated Feb. 20 of this year, quoted a "confidential informant" in connection with Dr. King's asserted acquaintanceship with a person in Los Angeles.

Pearson also cited what he said was an FBI memo dated July 7, 1961, dealing with the FBI's "eavesdropping policy."

This memo, which Pearson said was signed by Courtney Evans, former assistant FBI director, was quoted as stating that—in the use of listening devices in connection with organized crime—"the strong objections to the utilization of telephone taps as contrasted to microphone surveillances was stressed."

The memo, according to Pearson, also said, "The Attorney General [then Kennedy] noted that he had approved several technical surveillances in connection with security-type investigations since he took office..."

Upon Kennedy's arrival here from Portland, Mankiewicz reported that Kennedy would not personally discuss the matter. Mankiewicz, a permanent member of Kennedy's Senatorial staff, then dictated this statement:

"Sen. Kennedy has continuously stated that at no time while he was Attorney General did he approve or authorize any electronic surveillance ["bugging"] of anyone.

"Pursuant to policies in effect since President Roosevelt's executive order of 1940, he did, as Attorney General, approve a limited number of wiretaps in national security cases, but on each occasion only at the written request of the FBI.

"Since leaving the Justice Department, Sen. Kennedy has not discussed any particular individual case and he will not do so now."

"It is unfortunate that Drew Pearson is permitting himself to be used in J. Edgar Hoover's continuing campaign against Martin Luther King—now apparently against the memory of Martin Luther King.

"The information that Pearson discusses from the alleged surveillance was developed, according to him, in 1968, two Attorneys General and one President later and well after President Johnson's order forbidding such practices."

An FBI spokesman said there would be "no comment" from Hoover.

After saying he would produce "convincing evidence," Pearson dictated this reply from Washington to Mankiewicz' statement:

"First, regarding electronic surveillance. I have a memo dated Aug. 17, 1961, with Robert F. Kennedy's signature on it, in which he authorizes microphone surveillances.

"Second, the column which I prepared quotes extensively from another memo dated July 7, 1961, in which he [Kennedy] says he would like to see a list of the technical surveillances,

that he would like this brought over to him personally and that he had approved several technical surveillances.

"In connection with the charge that I am continuing J. Edgar Hoover's campaign against Martin Luther King, the fact is that I have probably been the No. 1 newspaper critic of J. Edgar Hoover.

"At no time have I talked to Hoover about King and I have been a personal friend of Dr. King over a period of several years.

"He has been entertained in my house and came to Washington last July as my guest to participate in a panel with Roy Wilkins, president of the NAACP, and Dick Gregory in a discussion of Negro big city problems over which I presided."

Mankiewicz, before issuing the statement for Kennedy, had said that he believed the document Pearson claimed bore Kennedy's signature was a document requiring the then Attorney General's counter-signature on a request to the telephone company in New York City to lease lines during an FBI investigation of organized racketeering. Mankiewicz said he had seen a copy of this document.