Mitchell Credits Wiretaps In 1,400 Convictions

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Attorney General John N. Mitchell said yesterday the government is making serious inroads in the fight against organized crime and credited more than 350 court-authorized wiretaps as having a "devastating effect" on criminal syndicates.

Over the past 32 months, Mitchell said, more than 1,400 organized crime and gambling figures have been convicted, and another 2,100 are in various stages of prosecution.

In a speech to the Associated Press Managing Editors convention in Philadelphia, the Attorney General stressed that those convicted or indicted include 170 state and local officials who had allegedly sold out to the underworld.

Mitchell said he had "small patience with those who fault Justice for taking a hard line on crooks," especially those holding public office who accept the fruits of organized crime.

"In many of the most blighted American cities, a successful attack on official corruption will open the way to elect public officials —often from the ranks of the minorities themselves—who are dedicated to solving problems rather than to feathering their own nests," he said.

Because it will contribute to improving the lot of inner-city residents, who are now crime's chief victims, Mitchell said the federal endeavor is a "social crusade."

Without actually naming former Attorney General Ramsey Clark, Mitchell clearly sought to disprove Clark's contention that organized crime was only a "tiny part" of the overall crime picture and that wiretapping was neither necessary nor proper.

Reviewing three years of wiretapping crime syndicates and the results, Mitchell said that in 1969 and 1970, the government installed 202 court-authorized taps that resulted in 752 arrests. So far this year, he said, the FBI alone has installed 148 taps resulting in about 750 arrests.

In addition, the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs has installed another 26 taps this year while the Attorney General has also approved some taps for other federal agencies.

Mitchell said that because of the time lag between arrest and trial "we have no true correlation as yet between wiretaps and convictions." However, he said that to date more than 170 convictions have resulted from FBI wiretaps alone.

Wiretapping leaders of organized crime, he said, has had a "far more devastating effect" than the figures illustrate. He said the crime boss in New Jersey and 45 associates, whom he did not identify, pleaded guilty to gambling conspiracy charges only after hearing their voices played back to them from tapes.

Without naming names, Mitchell said four of the five crime syndicate bosses in New York have either been indicted or convicted; nine of the 18 top crime leaders in Chicago are facing legal action and most top New England crime leaders are in prison.

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Reuter

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