Bobby Kennedy and Dick Tracy

By Drew Pearson

Some people have been wondering how such a nice guy as Sheldon Cohen, a tax expert, not a detective, ever got mixed up with wiretaps, secret microphones and peek-a-boo mirrors, as disclosed by the Senate wiretapping investigation.

Pearson

The answer is that he didn't. He inherited all this Dick Tracy paraphernalia. But there's more to the story — namely that the man who really started the eavesdropping vogue was none other than Bobby Kennedy when he was Attorney General.

Since Kennedy is now a distinguished Senator from New York, and since Senators belong to a self-protection society, it's not likely that the current wiretap probe, headed by Sen. Ed Long (D-Mo.), will delve into the role of Sen. Kennedy.

It should also be noted that, when he was Attorney General, Kennedy was engaged in a laudable campaign to track down the underworld and to that end gave Government gumshoes virtually an unrestricted hunting license to go after racketeers. He passed the word that they should use every weapon in their arsenal, including electronic devices.

Kennedy's objective was to smash organized crime, and he succeeded in scaring some underworld lords out of the rackets. The Justice Department also set new records in mobster convictions, though more minnows were hauled in than big fish.

Kennedy was able to unite all the Federal enforcement agencies in his drive, including Internal Revenue. As part of the Kennedy campaign, the following confidential instructions were sent to Internal Revenue agents on Feb. 24, 1961: "The tax returns of major racketeers, to be identified by the Department of Justice, will be subjected to the 'saturation type' investigation, utilizing such manpower on each case as can be efficiently employed.

"In conducting such investigations, full use will be made of available electronic equipment and other technical aids, as well as such investigative techniques as surveillance, undercover work, etc."

Secret Mikes

Even as the order was being signed, secret mikes were planted in the Internal Revenue offices in Pittsburgh, Pa., and Austin, Tex. Agents were able to eavesdrop on any taxpayer who came in with his attorney to answer a tax summons.

In Pittsburgh, zealous agents also installed a two-way mirror, which permitted them to watch the sweating taxpayers without being seen.

[Sen. Robert Kennedy made the following comment:

["1. Until this column was read to me, I never even heard of the memorandum described.

["2. I never heard of, let alone approved or instructed the use of, the kind of equipment described as being used by the Internal Revenue Service.

["3. I think that although mistakes were made, the Internal Revenue Service has made a major contribution to the fight against organized crime in the United States, for which all of us should be grateful."]

Congressional Disease

The last session of Congress was marked by the outbreak of a new disease—"canalitis." This is a rare malady, frequently contagious. When it strikes, the victim has a difficult time recovering.

The first Congressman smitten with a severe case of canalitis was Rep. Mike Kirwan of Youngstown, Ohio. Perhaps because of his age—79—the disease affected Mike in one of its most virulent forms.

It caused him to advocate a canal from Lake Erie to Pittsburgh, Pa. Naturally the outlet of the canal was to be at Mike's home town, Youngstown, and the canal was to carry coal, iron ore, etc., between Youngstown and Pittsburgh.

After the disease struck Kirwan, he talked to the Army Engineers, and in deference to a powerful member of Congress, they pronounced the canal feasible—though at a cost of over a billion dollars. Mike's colleagues in Congress immediately dubbed the project "Mike's billion-dollar ditch."

The two Senators from Pennsylvania, Joe Clark and Hugh Scott, who seemed to be immune from canalitis, opposed the ditch, and it was ditched.

However, the contagion has spread. The next man to come down with an attack of canalitis was Rep. Albert W. Johnson, the Pennsylvania Republican, who was smitten with the disease in the most virulent form. He proposed a canal from Lake Erie, beginning near Erie, Pa., to Franklin, Pa. He also proposed using the Allegheny River, deepened and widened, to reach Pittsburgh.

The Army Engineers have not yet made an estimate on how much Johnson's rampant case of canalitis would cost the taxpayers before it's cured.

Meanwhile, he has put his Pennsylvania colleagues on a tough spot. Since they opposed Mike Kirwan's ditch in neighboring Ohio, they can't very well go to bat for a ditch in nearby Pennsylvania. They just wish that Congressmen would be less susceptible to the new disease of canalitis.

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