

Baltimore police deny spying charges

F Post 2-18-76

ANNAPOLIS (AP)—The governor's office released Tuesday a lengthy report by the Baltimore Police Department denying findings by a Senate investigating committee that police units had engaged in widespread unwarranted surveillance and illegal wiretap activities.

In the 300-page report top police officials insisted that no one in the department had conducted any illegal telephone intercepts or had surveilled and compiled dossiers on any person not tied to specific criminal activity.

"We have never participated in unlawful intercepts," said Col. Joseph F. Carroll, chief of the Criminal Investigation Division, in his portion of the report submitted to Police Commissioner Donald D. Pomerleau and forwarded to Gov. Marvin Mandel as part of the detailed response to a report issued last month by the Constitutional and Public Law Committee following a year's probe of the department.

Carroll repeatedly denied a series of committee allegations that police vice squad personnel and employees of the Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Co. of Maryland had regularly tapped telephones without the required court orders.

Likewise denied was a committee allegation that police officers regularly falsified the source of information from illegal wiretaps when they went before judges to obtain search warrants against such activity as illicit gambling. Carroll

called this allegation "absurd."

A second section of the report to Mandel was written by Major Bernard F. Norton, director of the Inspectional Services Division (ISD), a secret police unit which came under attack in the Senate committee report.

The committee charged that the ISD regularly obtained confidential information on citizens from credit bureaus and conducted widespread, unwarranted surveillance of persons such as politicians, community leaders and members of the media not tied to any specific criminal activity.

"I find the report is one of conclusions alone and those conclusions apparently not based on any discernible evidence," Norton wrote. "I find it shocking that documentation and sources for their conclusions are not listed."

Norton said that while the ISD received "unsolicited" reports on the personal habits of individuals, this information "was of no interest to us and was never recorded or disseminated."

Norton said that any ISD surveillance of political campaigns, community groups and even meetings of public bodies such as the city School Board were aimed at preventing trouble by "revolutionaries who advocated disruption or violence."

In another portion of his report, Norton said the ISD maintained surveillance of such organizations as the Black Panthers, National State's Rights Party, Ku

Klux Klan, American Nazi Party and Fighting American Nationalists.

Such activities were "in keeping with our sworn duties. Persons not suspected of criminal activities or those who never advocated violence were never surveilled," he said.

Norton acknowledged, however, that police officers known and unknown to Rep. Parren Mitchell, D-Md., were at his campaign headquarters on Nov. 3, 1970, as Mitchell was on his way to becoming the state's only black congressman.

"These were troubled times and there were those among his followers who not only advocated violence but were quite capable of committing violence," he said, adding that the impetus for the police action came at a Mitchell rally when someone in the audience stood up, lit a match and indicated fires might be set if Mitchell lost the election.

"Political campaigns were never infiltrated," Norton said. "We had no interest in the political campaigns of any political aspirants."

Regarding committee allegations that ISD operatives spied on meetings of civic groups and governmental bodies, Norton said: "The group itself, unless it was a group that publicly dedicated itself to violence, was of no interest. However, there were from time to time persons who attended these group meetings who were not of the same high caliber as the persons who directed groups or had no interest in the purpose of the group itself."