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Pomerleau Spy Issue Now is One of Race

Annapolis.

The whole matter of Donald D. Pomerleau, and his Baltimore Police Department's unconscionable meddling in the private lives of Maryland citizens now stands in considerable danger of being talked right under the rug.

The police commissioner, for all his indiscretions, is a skilled veteran of the bureaucratic wars. He knows when to bristle, when to placate, and when to bore his listeners into a stupor. He has survived nearly nine years in Baltimore, though he is less than beloved of his men, and now looks to be on the way to surviving some more. For a number of reasons, that would be too bad.

Let's consider the situation. Mr. Pomerleau's department stands accused in the newspapers of a number of unsavory practices, from spying on people because of their political views to trying to entrap a journalist with women in order to be able to blackmail him.

The stories, while appalling, have not yet been nailed down hard. As with virtually every scandal, there is just so much the press can do; someone with subpoena power must finish the job. But incomplete as they are, there is an unpleasantly familiar ring to these accounts. One remembers all too well the Watergates Tales, and how the White House hoodlets burgled Dr. Lewis J. Fielding's office

and tapped Joseph Kraft's telephone.

Mr. Pomerleau's response, to a state Senate committee with all the hunting instinct of a family of hamsters, was that in the heated political climate of the late 1960's the Police Department had to "broaden the sphere of operations" of its intelligence unit to include radical groups as well as organized crime. Those days have passed, he said reassuringly, and so have those operations.

The committee, and probably most of the Legislature, is of a mood to be reassured. "This department has been receiving great support from Middle America," said the commissioner, and the senators gazed back at him, and at his Hoover white shirt, dark suit and law-abiding bald head, with instinctive approval in their eyes.

What has happened to the Pomerleau matter is that, largely through ineptitude on the part of the commissioner's critics, the issue has become one of race. It shouldn't have, but it has.

At the Pomerleau hearing Tuesday, the chief proponents of the state Senate's resolution to investigate the matter include most of the city's black political establishment: Representative Parren J. Mitchell (D) of the Seventh congressional district; former state's attorney Milton B. Allen; and state Senators Verda F. Welcome, the resolution's sponsor, Clarence W. Blount and Clarence M. Mitchell 3d,