

# Police Surveillance in Birmingham Once Extended to a Vice President

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala., June 20—A cache of city documents discovered here recently shows that a surveillance effort carried out by the Birmingham police department in the 1960's, originally aimed at civil rights leaders, was broadened to include politicians and at one point even collected information on a private conversation of the then Vice President, Hubert H. Humphrey.

The surveillance system was set up by Eugene (Bull) Connor, the segregationist Police Commissioner, to combat civil rights activists. But after Mr. Connor left office in 1963, according to the documents, it was widened to monitor the activities of several political candidates and, less frequently, the appearances in Birmingham of such white politicians as Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama and Mr. Humphrey.

The records, being preserved here by the Birmingham Public Library and a new civil rights archive, show that the surveillance operation relied primarily on detectives and undercover informers. But it also used information from such private institutions as a bank, an airline, a newspaper and a college.

## Notes on a Phone Call

The unsigned "notes" on Mr. Humphrey's visit to the city in 1967 said, "Just before the Vice President left Birmingham he took off privately to make several telephone calls we know that one of them was to Reverend Gardner."

The report then quotes Mr. Humphrey as telling the Rev. Edward Gardner, a black civil rights leader, that "he was sorry that his time would not permit him to meet privately with him and other Negro leaders. He also assured Reverend Gardner that he would talk to the Mayor of Birmingham before he left, if he had to talk to him on the way to the airport. He stated he felt sure all their differences would be settled within a few days."

It was not clear from the report whether Mr. Humphrey's remarks had been obtained from a wiretap. Such a tap was apparently used to obtain another document on file in the Birmingham library, the transcript of a 1963 conversation between the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and his wife, Coretta, when Dr. King was in jail for leading civil rights demonstrations here.

A transcript of the King conversation turned up last week in "the Connor papers," 250,000 pages of municipal documents discovered earlier this year under a pile of debris in an abandoned fire station. The Humphrey document was found among the police files of the late Albert Boutwell, the white moderate who succeeded Mr. Connor and his allies at City Hall in 1963.

## Federal Grant Requested

The Birmingham Public Library has applied for a \$68,000 Federal grant to establish, with these and similar docu-

ments, a major archive of the civil rights movement here in the city that so violently resisted integration. Together, the Connor and Boutwell papers document intensive surveillance carried out between 1959 and 1967.

Mr. Connor directed the surveillance program almost entirely at civil rights rallies, and his handwritten notations indicate that he combed the reports for tidbits he could use to stir resistance among whites. "Good, use this in campaign," Mr. Connor scrawled atop a report that a black leader was opposed to his re-election in 1961.

Under Mr. Boutwell, the surveillance was extended to the Ku Klux Klan and other segregationist groups suspected in racial bombings here. But, at the same time, detectives began monitoring meetings of such other groups as the National Urban League and the John Birch Society. The police reports also make it clear that visits from detectives were sometimes used to encourage adherence to segregation among whites thought to be wavering.

The neatly typed reports by city detectives indicate that they were aided in monitoring civil rights activists and sympathizers by sources within The Birmingham News, Eastern Airlines, the administration of Birmingham Southern College, Birmingham Trust National Bank and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

## Report From Airline

For instance, in May 1963, when the police were battling demonstrators with fire hoses and police dogs, a police sergeant sent this message to Police Chief Jamie Moore: "At approximately 2 A.M. I received a call from the Eastern Airlines at the Birmingham Airport. They reported to me that a group of 10 Jewish Rabbis and 35 black males had just unloaded from their New York flight."

A report by a detective says that he and a Birmingham News reporter had tried to obtain photographs of whites attending the funerals of four black girls killed in the 1963 bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church here.

James Barton, a lawyer for The Birmingham News, confirmed that a News reporter had provided information to the city police, Jefferson County Sheriff's Department and the F.B.I. while covering the civil rights movement for The News. Mr. Barton said that the paper's executives knew of the reporter's cooperation with the authorities, but the paper's executive editor, John Bloomer, denied this.

In a series of reports, various detectives described how they had thwarted civil rights activities at Birmingham-Southern College, then all white, which had a reputation for liberalism.

An exchange with college officials of the names of students and faculty mem-

bers sympathetic to the demonstrators led to the expulsion of a woman student who joined a sit-in in the 1963 demonstrations. The president of the college agreed to the arrest of any civil rights organizer visiting the campus and cooperated with the police in their efforts to recruit a white woman student as an informer, according to the police reports.

Under police supervision, the young woman, identified as "S" in police documents, traveled as far as Atlanta with organizers of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and told detectives which of her classmates had been contacted by the civil rights group. She also dated leaders of the segregationist National States Rights Party, a group suspected of involvement in the church bombing, and reported to a detective on the sexual inclinations of party officials.

When the police suspected a white woman working at Birmingham Trust National Bank of participating in the 1963 demonstrations, one report disclosed, they went to two executives of the bank's personnel department. The detective reported, "Neither one believes this girl to be guilty, believes there is a mistake in identity, but there will be an investigation made."

## 'Ripples of Discontent'

The library's decision to preserve such documents has caused a "few ripples of discontent" here, said Marvin Y. Whiting, the archivist who, with his assistant, Robert G. Corley, discovered the papers.

Recently, for example, the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce refused to contribute the records of its secret 1963 negotiations with Dr. King, even though historians regard those negotiations—which resulted in the desegregation of downtown stores and broke Mr. Connor's political hold in the city—as the chamber's brightest hour.

Even so, one crowning irony may emerge from the library's preservation project. In demanding weekly reports on the civil rights rallies from his detectives, Mr. Connor inadvertently became an able historian of the movement he deplored. "It's a fair statement," said Mr. Corley, "that the Birmingham police made the best record of what went on in the mass meetings."