

## William F. Buckley Jr.

### King Wiretap Poses Confidence Crisis; Scandalous Implications Need Probing

It transpires that the telephone of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was bugged over a period of at least two years, a bit of information of scandalous implications which hit the news as a result of an investigation, utterly tangential, into the complicated affairs of Cassius Clay. The chain of events is as follows:

1) Cassius Clay appeals his conviction for refusing to serve in the Army.

2) His lawyers demand that the Justice Department reveal what information against Clay they got from the tapping of his telephone.

3) Among Clay's telephone conversations were some with Dr. Martin Luther King, which conversations it turns out were overheard by the FBI not because Clay's telephone was being tapped but because King's telephone was being tapped.

4) All hell breaks loose. Yes, the FBI conceded, it is true that the telephone of MLK was being tapped.

The reason for it, a spokesman said, was that the allegation had reached Atty. Gen. Robert Kennedy that MLK was keeping very bad company, most specifically one individual whose complicity with the Communist movement was suspect, so that the FBI, on Kennedy's orders, tapped King's line.

5) That went on for two years, stretching several months after Robert Kennedy was replaced as attorney general by Nicholas Katzenbach.

The FBI gave it to be understood that Katzenbach ratified Kennedy's instructions to tap Dr. King's telephone.

6) Sometime in 1965 the taps apparently stopped. It is a question to which one receives conflicting answers what exactly happened at that point. According to former Atty. Gen. Ramsey Clark,

7) J. Edgar Hoover kept after him for permission to resume



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the tapping of Dr. King's telephone but the permission was denied.

Interesting questions: was permission denied because Ramsey Clark recoiled against Robert Kennedy's original authorization of the telephone tap? Because, surveying the fruits of two years' eavesdropping, he concluded — in disagreement with Hoover — that the findings did not justify a continuation of the tap?

Were J. Edgar Hoover's personal passions involved? In 1964 Mr. Hoover denounced Dr. King in an interview with a journalist, damning him as "the most notorious liar in the coun-

try."

The ostensible reason for his denunciation was King's accusation against the FBI that they were not doing their duty in the South in tracking down civil rights violations.

That charge against the executive was so routine that sophisticated observers ruminated at the time that Hoover had something graver against Dr. King than merely King's use of the usual polemic against the establishment's law enforcers. What?

Suppose that one gives every one of the principals the benefit of the doubt. In that case one assumes: 1) That Robert Kennedy, attorney general, had prima facie grounds for believing that the best interests of the internal security warranted tapping the telephone of Martin Luther King.

2) That Nicholas Katzenbach, attorney general, decided responsibly in 1965 that the telephone taps had not revealed anything of sufficient value to justify the continuing violation of Martin Luther King's privacy.

3) That J. Edgar Hoover's disagreement was also responsible, i.e., that Katzenbach and Clark were not motivated by a fear of the political influence of King, and Hoover was not motivated by any desire to persecute King.

4) That Martin Luther King was not in fact in dalliance with enemies of the republic, nor was he planning grave internal disruptions.

This crisis of confidence warrants, even at the expense of the posthumous privacy of Martin Luther King, a congressional investigation, which should now go forward.