

Bell Hits Staff On Leaking Data On Probe of FBI

Post 5/18/77

General Griffin B. Bell accused some Justice Department employees yesterday of leaking information about the investigation of FBI wrongdoing in an effort to manipulate his actions in the case.

Bell has often complained about leaks of information concerning controversial investigations. But this was the first time he complained about leaks from department employees in the probe of FBI wiretapping, mail openings and burglaries in the early 1970s.

His remarks were in a speech for the judicial conference of the U.S. Court of Customs and Patent Appeals.

"Leaks regarding investigations and pending cases are unethical and inexcusable," Bell said. "It is doubly shocking that the leaks should apparently come from attorneys or other department personnel who are sworn to uphold the law, not to abuse it."

Bell said that as Attorney General he is responsible for managing the department. "Those doing the leaking are trying to manage me and channel the course of the investigation through their leaks," he said.

"They will not succeed. The law, fairness and ethical standards will be upheld in this investigation and all the others we undertake. There will be no exceptions."

For more than a year, the department has been investigating FBI tactics in its search for radical fugitives. A former FBI supervisor, John J. Kearney, was indicted last month on charges of conspiracy, wiretapping and mail opening. Department sources have said that other indictments are expected.

Bell authorized department lawyers to seek the indictment from a New York grand jury. He has vowed to stand by that decision and pursue the investigation despite protests from FBI employees and supporters.

In the speech, Bell said the department must follow "three great principles."

Department personnel "must be absolutely fair and the department must be as open as it possibly can be, within the constraints of fairness and national security," he said.

Defense Fund Formed By GOP Conservatives

NEW YORK, May 17 (AP)—Three conservative Republicans have announced the formation of a legal defense fund for present and former FBI agents charged with crimes in connection with their official duties.

The initial focus of the Citizens Legal Defense Fund for the FBI will be John J. Kearney, a retired agent indicted on charges of using wiretapping and mail opening against leftist radical groups in the 1960s.

Creation of the fund was announced Monday by former New York Sen. James L. Buckley, former Ambassador Clare Boothe Luce and former Treasury Secretary William E. Simon.

A fund-raising letter sent out last week under their names said "illegal leaks to the press" indicated Kearney could have avoided prosecution by cooperating with prosecutors and "blaming his superiors in the bureau."