

Nixon Letter Opened

Details of Secret CIA Mail Surveillance Told

Nixon will Be asked To testify

Washington

The CIA secretly and illegally read the mail of many prominent Americans and opened at least one letter addressed to Richard M. Nixon before he became president, the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee said yesterday.

Later in the day, the panel agreed unanimously to ask Mr. Nixon to testify in its wide-ranging probe of improper activities by U.S. agencies.

Chairman Frank Church (Dem-Idaho) said committee members felt Mr. Nixon himself was the "best witness" in a number of areas, including questions surrounding the short-lived Huston plan to give intelligence agencies sanction to break the law at times.

Mr. Nixon is not being called under subpoena, and Church would not say when or in what manner Mr. Nixon might appear.

Church disclosed that in June, 1968, the agency opened and read a letter, addressed to Mr. Nixon, which commented on his prospects in that year's presidential election. The letter was written by



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FORMER CIA COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE CHIEF JAMES ANGLETON
He said all mail of certain individuals to and from iron curtain countries was opened

Nixon speechwriter Raymond Price while traveling in the Soviet Union.

And Church said one of his own letters, written to his mother-in-law from the Soviet Union, was included in correspondence found by his committee's staff while probing the CIA mail-opening operation — a project which was begun in 1952 and not closed down until Feb. 15, 1973.

Church's first statement on the matter yesterday offered no detail but implied a wider scope to the mail surveillance than he later outlined.

In part he said, "We want to know why the CIA opened the mail of organizations such as the Ford Foundation, Harvard University, and the Rockefeller Foundation or why mail to and from persons such as (Federal Reserve Chairman) Arthur Burns, Representative Bella Abzug, Jay Rockefeller, Martin Luther King Jr., Richard Nixon himself, Hubert Humphrey and Edward Kennedy . . . should have been regularly opened and scrutinized by the CIA."

An aide subsequently questioned by reporters said at first that Nixon mail had been opened both before and during his tenure as President — and that mail of other Presidents had been scrutinized as well. The aide later withdrew that statement, say-

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inghe had misunderstood committee investigators, and Church himself confirmed the narrower version.

Church said that all the letters intercepted by the CIA were either sent from Communist Bloc countries or mailed from the United States to persons in those nations.

He said the mail files on prominent persons included single letters in some cases and a series of letters in others.

"These names were never on the (CIA) watchlist, so it is obvious that in the opening of mail they have gone very far afield in ed."

Church turned to James Angleton, the CIA's former counter-intelligence chief, to ask why the agency found it necessary to open the letter to Mr. Nixon.

"I would say it was very much in error," Angleton replied.

But Angleton insisted the overall operation had been valuable. He cited leads it provided in the still unsuccessful pursuit of Kathy Boudin, a woman allegedly seen running from an explosion which destroyed the Greenwich Village bomb factory of the Weathermen, a radical leftist group, on March 6, 1970.

"When we went back through the mail program letters we found she had written from Moscow 30 to 40 letters to people in the United States," Angleton said. "These were the only leads the FBI had. She's still a fugitive. It raises in anyone's mind the question of whether she's in Moscow."

But Church said the program's value must be balanced against the harm it did to the constitutional rights of American citizens.

"In the future, intelligence organizations had better honor the Constitution and the laws because that's what freedom is all about," Church said.

Senator Walter R. Mondale (Dem-Minn.) said that even the primary targets of the mail operation — those on the so-called watchlist — included such "patriotic, decent Americans" as Nobel prize winners John Steinbeck and Linus Pauling and labor leader Victor Reuther, brother of the late United Auto Workers founder Walter Reuther.

"What was the CIA's objective?" in opening the mail of those men, demanded Mondale.

Angleton said he preferred not to reply unless the panel went into executive-closed-session.

Angleton was questioned at some length about his role in the formulation of the so-called Huston plan, which envisioned use of illegal tactics such as break-ins and mail openings to gather domestic intelligence.

At one point, Mondale read from a talking paper prepared for Mr. Nixon for a June 5, 1970, meeting with chiefs of the U.S. intelligence community, a session which developed the Huston plan. But though Mr. Nixon approved the plan, he ordered its revocation five days later when then-FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover objected.

The memo read by Mondale quoted Mr. Nixon as saying the nation was confronted with a grave new crisis posed by the anti-war movement.

"Hundreds and perhaps thousands of people, mostly under 30, are determined to destroy our society," Mr. Nixon said in the paper.

"Our people, perhaps in reaction to the excesses of the McCarthy era, are unwilling to admit that their children might want to destroy their country," the memo continued.

Mondale declared that "This document expresses an enormous, unrestricted paranoid fear of the American people."

And when Angleton said that Mr. Nixon was dissatisfied with the domestic intelligence he had been getting, Mondale interjected: "That's because it didn't square with his paranoia."

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