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Ex-Purchasing Aide Is Key in Probe of FBI

Washington

The focus of the Justice Department's investigation of the first alleged instance of internal financial corruption in the history of the FBI is John P. Mohr, the retired head of the FBI's administrative division.

Justice Department lawyers according to one official are certainly working on a possible indictment of Mohr and possibly other past and present FBI officials.

In his administrative post, Mohr was responsible for approving all purchases of bureau equipment.

The lawyers are understood to be focussing on the bureau's relationship with a private firm that since 1938 has procured electronic eavesdropping equipment for the bureau.

A report of an internal bureau investigation of the potential scandal, ordered last year by FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley and forwarded last month to Attorney General Edward R. Levi, was returned to Kelley recently with instructions to undertake a more extensive inquiry, the officials said.

The initial investigation, which one official conceded could be characterized as a "whitewash," was ordered after one electronics manufacturer told the House intelligence committee that the cost of equipment he sold to the bureau through the firm, known as U.S. Recording Co., had been pushed up a third before being passed on to the FBI.

John Dowd, an organized crime specialist within the Justice Department who has been especially detailed to oversee the U.S. Recording investigation, declined yesterday to discuss any aspect of the matter.

But the department's investigation, which top FBI officials fear will irreparably tarnish the bureau's image of incorruptability if it results in any indictments, is known to be chiefly concerned with suggestions that Mohr or other FBI officials have received kickbacks from Joseph X. Tait, the head of U.S. Recording.

Agents of the Internal Revenue

Service have already conducted an investigation into Mohr's net worth, a standard IRS technique in potential kickback cases to determine whether an individual has been spending more money than he earned.

One Justice official said Kelley had given responsibility for the renewed bureau investigation of the matter to Richard H. Ash, an assistant FBI director who heads the bureau's identification division and who is relatively independent of Mohr's influence.

The first investigation rejected by Attorney General Levi was conducted by Harold Bassett, the head of the FBI's inspection division, whom officials described as close to Mohr and to Nicholas P. Callahan, currently Kelley's deputy and one of the FBI officials questioned in connection with the matter.

Asked why Levi had chosen to

ask the FBI to re-investigate some of its most powerful current and past officials rather than handing that task to another Justice Department or government agency, one official said that the Attorney General was determined to let the bureau demonstrate that it was capable of an impartial inquiry into its own activities.

None of the officials questioned could confirm a report that the Justice Department's inquiry had ranged beyond the bureau's procurement of electronic equipment from U.S. Recording to scrutiny of its purchases of items such as firearms and automobiles.

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