
Wiretap File That May Be Destroyed

Washington

Attorney General Edward Levi is seeking the immediate destruction of files the Justice Department compiled in 1969 from wiretaps and other surveillance on columnist Joseph Kraft, the department acknowledged yesterday.

The attorney general said that although the surveillance had originally been sought on the grounds of national security, he could find no records indicating such a justification was proper.

In addition, he said, the Privacy Act of 1974 prohibits retention of the records.

Apologizing for the surveillance, Levi said in a letter to Kraft's lawyers that the surveillance "would not accord with procedures currently in force governing the use of electronic surveillance."

However, Levi refused to comment on its legality by 1969 standards.

Kraft said in testimony before two Senate Judiciary subcommittees two years ago that the surveillance was initiated by the White House. Levi said in his letter that he found no indication that it was approved by any previous attorney general. The attorney general at that time was John Mitchell.

The surveillance involved a telephone wiretap placed in Kraft's office and home in Washington in June 1969; an electronic bug placed in his Paris hotel room later that year, and personal surveillance in Paris.

Kraft said in his testimony that the surveillance was initiated on the instructions of John Ehrlichman, then domestic advisor to President Nixon. "The reason given for this breach of traditional rights was national security," Kraft said. "But there is no evidence that genuine issues of national security were involved."

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