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Bugs and Leaks And Suspicions

— Joseph Kraft

PEOPLE who talk about themselves are boring, so I have been loath to discuss publicly the reports that my phone was tapped by the Nixon Administration.

However, I am impelled to break the silence by the nonsense now being advanced as justification for the wiretaps. My own case gives the lie to any claims that the Nixon Administration was only continuing what was done in the past or merely searching for national security leaks.

According to the reports — which I believe — my phone was tapped beginning in 1969. The tapping was done on orders of John Ehrlichman, formerly President Nixon's chief aide for domestic affairs. At one point, apparently because no information was coming in, the tap was suspended. The bug was removed by men who entered my home through a second-story window.

The tap was subsequently renewed. The whole job was done by White House security officials acting without authorization of either a judge or the Attorney General. The FBI never came into the case.

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THE MAIN justification offered by the administration for the wiretapping is the protection of national security. In that connection there have been claims that, in tapping the phones of journalists and officials, the Nixon Administration was only following a precedent. Thus, Henry Kissinger told Newsweek magazine that such wiretaps "were carried on through previous administrations."

But former Secretary of State Dean Rusk has publicly denied that American officials and journalists were subject to

wiretapping in the Kennedy or Johnson administrations. I have checked the record with White House and Defense Department officials who handled national security business under President Kennedy and Johnson. They also report that there was no such bugging. Moreover, my strong impression is that Kissinger has traced the record through some of the same former officials. I think he now has information that could cast doubt on what he told Newsweek.

To underpin the claim that national security justified the taps, administration officials, including President Nixon himself, have stressed the need to prevent leaks.

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ASSUMING I had had something to do with some leaks, the administration went about the wiretapping in a very odd way. For the regular procedure with national security involved is to have an order signed by the Attorney General for action by the FBI. But the FBI assured me that that was never done in my case.

Why not? Well, my impression is that national security wasn't even dimly involved. I think at the root of the matter is the credulous suspicion maintained by the President and his closest associates toward the press, the government bureaucracy and the academic community. In particular, they didn't trust Kissinger when he first came aboard.

Tapping was done as a check on his loyalty. In effect, the highest officials of the land sanctioned house-breaking and other illegal activities so they could hear what they fancied Kissinger might be saying behind Mr. Nixon's back. It is a sad, sad story.