

A Reply on Teamster Wiretaps



HENRY PETERSEN
'Grossly false'

Washington

Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen yesterday acknowledged that he has rejected an FBI request to continue wiretaps in an investigation of a suspected Mafia plan to penetrate the Teamsters Union.

But Petersen took sharp issue with a New York Times account which suggested that he and outgoing Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst had precluded further electronic surveillance on the basis of indications that the probe could prove embarrassing to Teamsters President Frank Fitzsimmons, one of the administration's strongest labor allies.

"The New York Times article is grossly false insofar as it implies that anything other than law enforcement considerations went into the judgment made by me in this matter," Petersen said.

He denied, moreover, that Kleindienst had anything to do with the wiretap termination.

(The New York Times today quoted Justice Department sources as saying that taps on 11 telephones at a Los Angeles consulting firm recorded conversations concerning a Mafia plan to reap millions of dollars in payoffs from the welfare funds of the Teamsters.

(The devices picked up talks among organized crime figures and others about how members of the underworld in Southern California and Chicago were going to split 10 per cent of

the money the Teamsters would pay to a Los Angeles physician under the terms of a prepaid health plan, the sources said.

(This dovetailed with information supplied to federal investigators that placed Fitzsimmons in a Palm Springs, Calif., meeting with three Mafia members, at which Fitzsimmons gave tentative approval to a health plan presented to him by the three, the sources said.

(Subsequent discussions recorded on the FBI's devices concerned the same health plan and Fitzsimmons's approval of it, the sources said).

By Petersen's account, Kleindienst earlier this year had approved the wiretaps.

But the FBI request for an extension was shelved by the organized crime and racketeering section and never reached either Kleindienst or himself, Petersen said.

At about the same time, Petersen said, the FBI asked separately, for authority to conduct new wiretaps, which he refused on grounds of "insufficient probable cause."

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