

DREW PEARSON

Sensational Side To Black 'Bugging'

WASHINGTON—By all odds the most sensational eavesdropping case in the history of Washington was that conducted by the FBI two blocks from the White House in the Sheraton Carlton Hotel suite of lobbyist Fred Black.

There have been other interesting wiretapping cases, such as that conducted by the late Sen. Owen Brewster, R-Maine, on behalf of Pan American Airways in the hotel suite of Howard Hughes, then owner of Trans World Airways. And there has been recent bugging by rival natural gas pipeline companies.

But what makes the Fred Black bugging sensational is, first, the fact that it was adjacent to the VIP suite used by the State Department to entertain distinguished foreign visitors, and the FBI's electronic devices were so strong that they couldn't help listening in on these visitors also.

Second, and more important, there was some indication that the attorney general who ordered the bugging, namely, Robert F. Kennedy, was interested in the activities of the then Vice-President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson.

OFFICIALLY, the FBI was supposed to be investigating possible links between Black and Las Vegas gamblers. Certainly the FBI was not probing Black's income taxes. This was Internal Revenue's job and it finally convicted him—a conviction thrown out of court when Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach and Deputy Attorney General Ramsay Clark forced the FBI to admit it had been listening in on Black and others on a wholesale scale for some years.

J. Edgar Hoover succeeded in getting Katzenbach eased out of the Justice Department in retaliation, and is now in the process of trying to put the skids under Ramsay Clark.

Regarding the Black electronic bug, however, the FBI is smart. It doesn't like to get mixed up in spying on



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highly placed politicians, and its agents were most restrained when they recorded, for instance, that a Senate "official"—not a senator—"engaged in activity with female" in the Black suite.

It also picked up some conversations by President Kennedy himself.

The name of the late Sen. Bob Kerr of Oklahoma was also mentioned, together with that of Vice-President Johnson and other Southwestern friends of LBJ's. Johnson was involved in nothing incriminating, but his political opinions were asked as to who could win and who could not win in certain political races.

The FBI would have dropped the investigation like a hot potato when such big names were mentioned. For politics is nothing the FBI has any business listening in on.

Parenthetically, this might give the present President of the United States a lesson in the dangers of wiretapping at a time when he is about to give Congress the green light on a new wiretapping law—despite the opposition of his attorney general.

TWO FACTS stand out regarding the FBI wiretapping of Black's apartment as all-important:

1—The FBI has confided to President Johnson that Bobby Kennedy personally ordered the bugging.

2—Attorney General Kennedy ordered the FBI to make a thorough probe of Bobby Baker, even assigned some of his own personal Justice Department investigators to go after Baker, as if he did not trust the FBI. Finally, he kept a secret copy of the Baker findings in his own office safe.

Since Baker as Senate secretary had long worked for Johnson as Senate majority leader, such a probe must have been aimed at the then vice-president. As it turned out, Baker's wheeling and

dealing started after Johnson left the Senate, and the late Sen. Kerr, not Johnson, was involved as Baker's mentor and benefactor.

Despite this, stories were leaked to the press—though never proved—that LBJ was involved.

All this was the beginning of the Bobby Kennedy-Johnson feud. It has smoldered deep, will never be smothered.

On Johnson's biggest day—his inaugural on Jan. 20, 1965, following his landslide triumph over Barry Goldwater—Kennedy made a show of visiting his brother's grave in Arlington. He arrived at the graveside in the morning, but because no photographers were around he came back again in the afternoon.

There could be no mistaking the message of the picture, which marred LBJ's inauguration. It was Kennedy's way of reminding the world who should have been president.

SUBSEQUENTLY, Kennedy has let it be known that he is ready to step into his brother's place if only Johnson will step aside. The hint was put most bluntly by Kennedy-intimate Ted Sorensen, who pointed out that three other vice-presidents who had ascended to the presidency in this century had not run for a second term.

"If Mr. Johnson of his own accord chooses to retire," said Sorensen, "No one can call that a retreat from the historical pattern when it would in reality be fidelity to it."

But President Johnson has no intention of abdicating to clear the way for Bobby Kennedy. If he should decide to retire from the White House, he would use his influence at the Democratic convention to block Kennedy's nomination, in favor of Hubert Humphrey.

Furthermore Johnson is a man who believes in gratitude and he remembers how in Bobby Kennedy's only bid for public office he was elected to the Senate from New York in 1964 by a 719,693 margin after he, LBJ, campaigned up and down the state for him. Johnson's majority was 2,669,597.