

## Levi Defers Making a Decision On an F.B.I. Communication Net

By DAVID BURNHAM

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 10—Attorney General Edward H. Levi refused today to give the Federal Bureau of Investigation immediate permission to build a computerized communications network that had been criticized as possibly leading to the creation of a national police force.

Mr. Levi, in a letter to Senator John V. Tunney, Democrat of California, said he was deferring action in the F.B.I. request pending approval by Congress of legislation controlling criminal justice information.

The F.B.I. plan for an expanded communications and record-keeping network has been criticized as a potential threat to civil liberties by the White House Office of Telecommunications policy, the Domestic Council's Committee on Privacy and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, a branch of the Justice Department.

In his letter to Senator Tunney, who is chairman of the Constitutional Rights Subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee, Mr. Levi said that some of the criticism of the bureau's plan showed a "measure of misunderstanding" about it.

"Nevertheless," Mr. Levi continued, "this criticism also reflects a widespread and genuine concern, which we share, regarding the privacy of criminal justice information and the proper role of the Federal Government in law enforcement today."

Senator Tunney, in a statement released from his Washington office said that the Attorney General's decision "will slow the frightening drift to-

ward a highly centralized police force."

A spokesman for the F.B.I., which has been actively seeking executive branch approval of its communication plan for more than a year, said that the bureau would not comment on Mr. Levi's decision.

Early last year, in a letter to William B. Saxbe, then the Attorney General, the acting director of the Office of Telecommunications Policy, John M. Eger, said that he feared the bureau's plan "could result in the absorption of state and criminal data systems into a potentially abusive, centralized, federally controlled communications and computer information system."

The part of the F.B.I. plan that has been the main target of critics is the technical ability known as "message switching," under which communications from one state to another would go through a bureau "switching center" rather than directly from state to state.

"Whoever will control criminal justice message switching will inevitably wield enormous power over the lives and reputations of all citizens," Senator Tunney said in his statement. "Giving this unlimited power to the F.B.I. without careful scrutiny begs for abuse."

He predicted that the legislation providing a national framework for handling criminal justice information would be approved before the end of the present Congress. The original legislation was introduced by Sam J. Ervin, who retired as a Democratic Senator from North Carolina last year.