

Hoover and Kennedy Trade New Charges on F.B.I. Use of Listening Devices

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 11—J. Edgar Hoover and Robert F. Kennedy made new charges today in their dispute over the responsibility for electronic eavesdropping by Federal agents during President Kennedy's Administration.

Mr. Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, branded as "absolutely inconceivable" Mr. Kennedy's statement yesterday that he had not known about all the bureau's eavesdropping when he was Attorney General.

Mr. Kennedy, now the junior Senator from New York, replied in a statement that his lack of knowledge of the surveillance by the F.B.I. "may seem 'inconceivable' to Mr. Hoover," but "it is nonetheless true."

The statement continued:

"The first time I became aware of these eavesdropping practices was when they were described in the press in connection with the Las Vegas investigation, and I promptly ordered it ceased. It is curious that Mr. Hoover does not recall this."

2 Occasions Recalled

Mr. Kennedy said that on two occasions during his tenure as Attorney General he had listened to what appeared to have been recorded conversations obtained in organized crime investigations. He said there had been no indication that they had been obtained illegally or that Federal agents had obtained them.

Spokesmen in Mr. Kennedy's office have told newsmen of reports that Mr. Hoover may produce evidence that Mr. Kennedy listened to tapes of conversations picked up by electronic devices in Chicago and New York.

"Although Mr. Hoover says that this activity was intensified while I was Attorney General and implied that we discussed it, the fact is that he never discussed this highly important matter with me, and no evidence exists supporting his recollection that we did," Mr. Kennedy said.

"Indeed, there is no indication that Mr. Hoover ever asked me for authorization for any single bugging device, in Las Vegas, New York, Washington or anywhere else."

He accused Mr. Hoover of "selectively making document public" and challenged him to make his entire file available, including information on whether any previous Attorneys General "were as uninformed as I was."

Document With Letter

The public dispute was touched off yesterday when Representative H. R. Gross, Republican of Iowa, released a letter from Mr. Hoover in which he said the bureau's eavesdropping had been done with the knowledge, approval and encouragement of Mr. Kennedy.

The Hoover letter was accompanied by a document dated Aug. 17, 1961, which discussed the use of hidden microphones in internal security, and major crime cases and bore the Kennedy signature.

In today's exchange, Mr. Hoover produced another document, signed by a former off-backed Mr. Kennedy's version of the events.

In yesterday's charges, Mr. Kennedy's office released a letter to Mr. Kennedy from Courtney A. Evans, the assistant director of the F.B.I. who had acted as liaison between Mr. Hoover and Mr. Kennedy when the New York Democrat was Attorney General.

Mr. Evans's letter, dated Feb. 17, 1966, noted the distinction between wiretaps, which are used to intercept telephone calls, and bugging devices, which are hidden microphones.

Referring to the bugs, he said: "I did not discuss the use of

these devices with you in national security or other cases, nor do I know of any written material that was sent to you at any time concerning this procedure, or concerning the use, specific location or other details as to installation of any such device in Las Vegas, Nevada, or anywhere else."

Today Mr. Hoover released a memorandum from Mr. Evans to a superior, a man identified only as Mr. Belmont, dated July 7, 1961.

It said:

'We Had Taken Action'

"In line with the director's approval, the Attorney General was contacted this morning, July 7, 1961, relative to his observation as to the possibility of utilizing "electronic devices" in organized crime investigations.

"It was pointed out to the Attorney General that we had taken action with regard to the use of microphone surveillances in these cases and while they represented an expensive investigative step, we were nevertheless utilizing them in all instances where this was technically feasible and where valuable information might be expected.

"The strong objections to the utilization of telephone taps as contrasted to microphone surveillance were stressed.

"The Attorney General stated he recognized the reasons why telephone taps should be restricted to national defense-type cases and he was pleased we had been using microphone surveillances where these objections do not apply wherever possible in organized crime matters."

In his statement today, Mr. Hoover cited this document and another by Mr. Evans that accompanied the Kennedy document of Aug. 17, 1961, as proof that "the F.B.I.'s use of microphone and wiretap surveillance was known to and approved by Mr. Kennedy."

Mr. Kennedy replied that "I believe Mr. Evans was telling the truth in his letter to me dated Feb. 17, 1966."

He Also Heard Tape

William G. Hundley, chief of the Justice Department's organized crime section under Mr. Kennedy and now assistant to Commissioner Pete Rozelle of the National Football League, said in an interview that he had been present in Chicago when a tape of a conversation was played in Mr. Kennedy's presence.

"No explanation was made as to how the tape was obtained or by whom," he said. The one thing I'm positive of is that Kennedy said nothing.

The conversation appeared to be between two individuals complaining that an honest police captain had been appointed, Mr. Hundley said. He said that there had been nothing to suggest that the tape might have been illegally obtained.

"I never, never discussed the problem of F.B.I. devices with him [Mr. Kennedy]," Mr. Hundley said.

He said the F.B.I. had always checked with him before it planted devices of questionable legality.

"I assumed they would clear with him any bug that clearly was not legal," he said.

"I have found that that's not true."