

Congress Questions Ethics of Telephone Monitoring

By NEIL A. MARTIN
 United Press International
 WASHINGTON (UPI) — Your telephone conversations with some federal agencies here may not be as private as you think. But each agency will deny it is "snooping."

If one eavesdrops on your call — and more than 40 departments do — it is, they say, because it is faster, cheaper and more efficient, to have your talks monitored for future reference.

Every year the government spends thousands of dollars for recording devices to record telephone conversations — with or without the consent of the caller.

This is especially true in sensitive agencies such as the Atomic Energy commission, the Defense department, the Central Intelligence agency, and the State and Agriculture departments.

These offices account for more than half of the monitoring equipment in use, with the AEC the biggest spender; records show that in fiscal year 1961 it

spent \$8,240 on listening-in devices, the largest sum budgeted to any agency.

Ethics Questioned

The ethics of the practice are questioned frequently by some legislators and Congress already has made two "studies" to determine whether drastic ground rules are called for.

The last probe was by a special House Information subcommittee which disclosed that the agencies were spending more than \$30,000 a year on monitoring. This did not include an initial investment of \$100,000 for recording equipment.

Basically, the agencies employ four types of eavesdropping equipment:

—Transmitter cutoff switches. These permit a third party to listen to another person's call without fear of breathing or other background noises being heard by the caller.

—Listening-in circuits. These provide the same services except that they are built right into the telephone. This reduces

the loss of transmission power which could tip the caller to the third party on the line.

—Induction attachments. These are suction cup devices attached to the telephone and plugged into a standard telephone set.

—Recording machines. These are wired into the telephone circuit. But in accordance with law, these machines are equipped with electronic "beeps" which warn the caller that his remarks are being recorded.

The agencies contend that it is faster and cheaper to have

a secretary, for example, monitor a telephone conversation and take notes for future reference when the caller comes by the office.

A spokesman for the AEC said that cutoff and listening switches were particularly necessary in very noisy locations because they "minimize background noises and permit secretaries to record essential details on designated telephone conversations."

In fiscal 1961, the AEC reported 28 telephone recorders, 390 cutoff switches, six listening circuits, and 13 induction attachments. However, since June,

1962, the agency has removed 10 of the recorders, all of the induction machines, and cut down the number of listening devices to 178.

Several other agencies have reduced the number in use and have adopted strict regulations on monitoring.

Although there is nothing illegal about the practice it is well known that it can lead to embarrassing situations.

Freshmen senators and congressmen quickly learn about it and some instruct their staffs to limit conversations with executive agencies to routine business.

For example, an assistant to freshman Sen. Peter H. Dominick (R-Colo.) told United Press International: "Shun Telephone."

"Although several members of our staff were familiar with the practice, we called a special meeting last January to decide that all confidential business with the agencies would be done in person and in our own offices."

The "economy" of telephone monitoring was questioned by Rep. John E. Moss (D-Calif.), who headed the special information subcommittee.

"Even more important," Moss said, "is the indication of a dangerous drift toward a huge bureaucracy peering over the shoulder of the citizen. There is something mean and unprincipled in a government official arranging for a secretary — or a transcribing machine — to eavesdrop on telephone calls."

In September, 1961, telephone monitoring was spotlighted by an incident involving a congressional staff investigator and 4th Army headquarters in Houston, Texas.

In a routine call to the headquarters to discuss information

problems in connection with an Army seminar, the investigator was told that his conversation was being recorded. He asked for a transcript and received what he said was a garbled, edited and inaccurate record of the conversation.

Original Destroyed

When he asked for the original dictabelt of the call, he said, he was informed that it had been "destroyed along with other obsolete material in accordance with standing operating procedures."

By the time the controversy was cleared up, Secretary of the

Army Elvis J. Stahr Jr. had acknowledged that there had been "a number of editorial changes" in the telephone text. He ordered the inaccurate transcript removed from the 4th Army files.

While there was nothing sinister about the edited transcript, the incident did indicate to Congress what can happen in monitoring practices.

"You have to be so careful today," Moss said at the time. "With all the modern electronic equipment available, they can do a beautiful job of editing conversations."



STOWAWAY RETURNED—Marguerite "Mimi" Gerstell, 17, of Wayne, Pa., is shown as she arrived at New York's Idlewild Airport. She is the first girl to stowaway on the liner "Queen Mary." She went aboard to see a friend off and stayed for the trip. When discovered, she was flown back to New York. (UPI)

Critical Period for Forest Fires Noted By OSU Specialist

CORVALLIS—This is a critical period for forest fires and no time for the public to let up in its efforts to prevent man-caused fires, according to Charles R. Ross, Oregon State university extension forestry specialist.

So far, forest protection officials are encouraged by what appears to be a more careful attitude on the part of the public, Ross said, noting that through July man-caused fires totaled 198 compared with 315 for the same period last year.

Fire prevention workers, aided by a relatively damp summer so far, point out that weather conditions can change rapidly and set the stage for serious burning conditions. Some of Oregon's worst forest fires have occurred in late summer and early fall.

Western Oregon forests this year are littered with tremendous amounts of flash fuel from the Columbus Day windstorm. It is estimated that half the forest land has enough wind-strewn debris to materially increase the fire fighting problem, the specialist said.

A Common Goal

"A common danger draws people to a common goal," Ross commented. "We have a common goal in Oregon to impress upon every responsible citizen the potential peril posed to strike our forests. We must get the active support of every citizen in preventing fires. Everyone should be conscious of the threat to Oregon's economy and scenic attractions."

Smokers, campers and debris burners are responsible for starting about 60 per cent of Oregon's man-caused fires, Ross pointed out. These can be avoided by following some simple rules.

Avoid smoking while traveling in the woods. Stop and smoke in a safe place. It is

Bicycle Riders Should Know Rules

Parents whose children will ride bicycles to and from school this fall should make certain youngsters know and obey safe cycling rules, Medford Police Capt. Clyde Fichtner said today.

Fichtner said parents should never assume a youngster knows how to operate a bike in a traffic situation. Parents should "check-out" young riders on the rules and occasionally "check-up" on them to see that they are following the rules, he commented.

It also is essential for youngsters to operate safe bicycles, he said. Minimum safety equipment for a bike is a working headlight, a red reflector on the back of the bike, a good brake and some type of warning device. The handlebars and seat saddle also need to be properly adjusted for the rider.

Bicycle accidents involving riders under 15 injured 303 persons in Oregon last year. Four were killed, according to records in the department of motor vehicles.

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