

PLS return

In France, It's Now Become a

By Don Cook

Los Angeles Times

PARIS — When Pierre Salinger was at the White House as President Kennedy's press secretary, he made a secret trip to Paris for a meeting with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's son-in-law.

The U.S. embassy had been informed that Salinger was coming, and in turn had informed the French government, but his presence in Paris was not supposed to become public knowledge until he had been here several days and completed his mission.

Meanwhile, Salinger telephoned an old friend with whom he had occasionally stayed on his Paris visits — unannounced, or so he thought.

"Oh, we were expecting a call from you," his friend said.

"How did you know I was in Paris?" Salinger asked, surprised.

"The bug went in on our telephone two days ago," was the laconic, matter-of-fact reply.

Wiretapping is part of the way of life in France.

Naturally—because bugging telephones is a secret operation which the French government scarcely ever even admits to — it is a matter of speculation how extensively and intensively the French do listen in on phone conversations.

All the embassies in Paris assume their phones are listened to. Journalists, politicians, high civil servants, criminals, spies, dope peddlers, bankers and international businessmen must make the same assumption.

The newspaper *France-Soir* recently estimated that about 1,000 phone numbers are listened to daily.

Ostensibly, since 1970, listening in on a phone conversation without a warrant from a magistrate

Way of Life—

THE WASHINGTON POST Thursday, July 20, 1972 G 3

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is illegal in France.

For practical purposes, this procedure is really applied only in cases where the French are after somebody whom they may want to take to court—criminals, fraud cases, narcotics operators, etc.

It is not known by what procedures or authority the French secret services undertake wiretapping, but what is perfectly certain is that they can do about what they like in the name of state security.

Journalists are regular "targets," apparently because the government likes to know whom the newsmen are talking to and what they are being told.

Almost certainly, American journalists were being listened to much more intensively in the de Gaulle days than in the present relaxed atmosphere. In those times a high French official once told me at

lunch, quite casually, that my phone was being tapped and that in the future we should arrange our lunch dates by mail because his own home telephone was also tapped. Since he held a job which gave him access to top security dossiers, he ought to have known.

One well-known French journalist received a call early one morning from a left-wing foreign refugee in France, telling him that his residence permit was being canceled and he had been given 48 hours to leave the country. The journalist said he would put up the man's wife and child and see what he could do to get the ruling rescinded.

When the journalist got to his office a few hours later, he was called in by the editor who had already received a written report from the French security services complaining that their reporter was "in secret

contact" with a left-wing radical who was being expelled. With the editor's backing, the reporter went immediately to the office of the security official who had written the complaint, and demanded that the bugging of his telephone be suspended. But he did not kid himself that it worked. Politicians, members of the National Assembly

and — particularly top communists—operate on the assumption that they may be listened to.

Few Frenchmen really get very upset about it—probably because it does not have sinister implications which go with telephone tapping in a place like Moscow.

The closest there has been to a recent public fuss about telephone bugging was a question formally addressed to the government

in the National Assembly last March by Michel Poniatowski, a member of the Republican Independent Party a pro-government group.

He asked to what extent the telephones of Assembly deputies and of French citizens were being tapped. When the Assembly adjourned for the summer in early July, Poniatowski had still not received even an evasive answer.

Except in criminal ac

tions — and even then only very rarely — the French never disclose what they have learned through wiretapping. Wiretap material certainly is used by the security authorities. In the case of diplomatic intelligence, it circulates to the top ministers and key officials. But the French generally maneuver an investigation so that wiretapping

evidence is not pinpointed as the key in the operation.

The French listen in on their own trusted civil servants just as impartially as they listen in on adversaries. Once a senior official at the Quai d'Orsay, who held somewhat independent views which did not always coincide with government policy, concluded a rather routine conversation in his

office with a journalist friend, and then walked with him out into the corridor.

"There's something I want to add," he began quite casually, "but my office is bugged."

Can you really detect a bug when it goes in on your telephone? Maybe yes—maybe no. French telephone service is notoriously erratic

in any case. Probably some operations are conducted more carefully than others. Static on the line, a funny click after the dial tone begins or even the line cutting off unexpectedly is likely to prompt foreigners long resident in France—and a good many Frenchmen as well—to mutter impatiently into the mouthpiece, "So they're tapping my line again."