

British Paper Officially Rebuked; Disclosed Cables Are Monitored

Washington Post Foreign Service

LONDON, Feb. 21—It appeared this morning that Britain was heading for its own controversy over alleged abuse of power by intelligence agencies when a London daily blazoned this headline: "Cable Vetting Sensation."

But by midafternoon the incipient controversy was nipped off, British style, by invoking the secrecy procedure known as the "D-Notice."

In Parliament, Prime Minister Wilson accused the Daily Express of violating a voluntary self-censorship tradition by reporting that cables and telegrams sent from Britain were regularly examined by security authorities.

Instead of answering questions about scrutiny of private communications, Wilson blamed the Daily Express for ignoring a 40-year-old procedure whereby on a voluntary

basis newspapers suppress stories subject to a D-Notice.

The Daily Express story by Chapman Pincher said the security check could be applied to all cables sent or received from abroad whether by individuals, companies or embassies. Embassies, the story alleged, are allowed to send messages in code, but companies can use only accepted commercial codes.

The authority for this scrutiny is obtained by special warrant authorized by the Official Secrets Act of 1920 and regularly renewed to keep it valid. The procedure is the same as is used in Britain to get permission for telephone tapping or mail opening.

The substance of the Daily Express story was carried in later editions this morning of the Times and Daily Mail. Government spokesmen exempted the two papers from the criticism, asserting they

had no choice once the Daily Express ignored the secrecy request.

In his statement to Parliament, Wilson explained the D-Notice system under which the government warns newspapers that publication of any particular item would be against national interest on security grounds.

The Prime Minister then said:

"Unfortunately, the confidence and trust, which are the basis of the whole system, have been called into question by the action of one newspaper in initiating this morning a sensationalized and inaccurate story purporting to describe a situation in which in fact the powers and practice have not changed for well over 40 years."

There are no penal sanctions for violating D-Notice requests, but government spokesmen said they could recall no occasion in the past in which a D-Notice had been deliberately ignored.

Americans, reporting this curious episode, were led to reflect that an expose story that could win a U.S. newspaper a Pulitzer Prize would in Britain earn the editor a denunciation for breeching security practices.