

Rights Vs. Spying Bothers British

LONDON (AP) — While the Central Intelligence Agency is under scrutiny, Britain is having its own inquiry into national security and how it may involve personal rights.

Issues at stake include the activities of spies and spy catchers, and the protection of military secrets.

An overriding factor is this country's relations with the United States, which works closely with Britain on intelligence. American confidence in British security methods has several times been shaken by espionage scandals. Prime Minister Harold Wilson's government has vowed to eliminate defects slipshod methods, outdated techniques.

Also involved is the way in which the British government can best preserve the cooperation of newspaper broadcasting and other information media in defense of the nation's secrets while freedom of the press is upheld.

Wilson insists he has introduced no new procedures curbing individual liberties regarding such things as telephone tapping, mail checking or the vetting of cables. "Vetting" is a British term for scrutiny or examination. When newspaper subeditors vet stories here they do much the same work as U.S. copyreaders who peruse and edit them before supplying headlines.

An investigation of the various facets of how to handle secrets is being undertaken by Lord Radcliffe of the high court and two former defense ministers — Laborite Emanuel Shinwell and Conservative Selwyn Lloyd.

Their inquiry will include a public clash between Wilson and the Daily Express a mass circulation daily built up by the late Lord Beaverbrook.

Each has challenged the other's veracity in an affair that reached the level of a fullscale inquiry.

A man carried a bag of papers from the offices of a commercial cable company in downtown London and dumped it in a waiting car. The car was driven to the General Post Office.

At that point it seems security men took over to go through all the papers — which were cables transmitted abroad by residents of Britain.

The security men did not know they themselves were being watched.

A self-appointed sleuth had photographed the car transfer. Later he took his pictures to newspapers and a television company to sell them.

All but the Express decided against using either the information or the pictures. They did so after consulting with a watchdog group known as the Services Press and Broadcasting Committee. This body made up of five civil service chiefs in defense departments and 11 press and information media representatives operates what in effect is a voluntary censorship.

The Daily Express did not print the proffered pictures but under a headline "cable vetting sensation" it reported that security men regularly check private messages leaving Britain.

A political storm broke. Many Britons were startled to learn that their communications were checked to see if they contained intelligence for use by security military or criminal branches. Some were concerned to discover that information extracted from cables could be passed on to the treasury or other authorities.

They were equally startled to be told by Wilson that this ca-

ble-vetting process has been going on since 1927. Past governments introduced and perpetuated the system under powers deriving from the 47-year-old Official Secrets Act. Wilson said the Labor government had left the practice unchanged.

While all this was going on Wilson met with Conservative leader Edward Heath. He explained the circumstances as he saw them that lay behind the Express story and how he proposed to deal with the situation. Heath later called for a formal inquiry and Wilson accepted the idea.

At the center of the probe according to its terms of reference is just how the Express came to disregard advice and requests which the government says it made.

Part of the explanation lies in a peculiar institution known as the D-notice system.

This is a device for protecting defense secrets and the methods and activities of espionage and counter espionage services. For instance some years ago it was taboo to refer to "M16" as being the nation's counterespionage force. Another time a D-notice asked papers to refrain from mentioning certain aspects of the George Blake affair. Blake a double agent escaped from jail presumably behind the Iron

Curtain after being sentenced to 42 years for spying for the Soviet Union.

The Express maintained no D-notice or supplementary guidance inhibited use of the cable-vetting story.

Wilson and his advisers insist two such notices warn that references to the activities and

methods of security men can only put spies on their guard. They assert stories of the kind that appeared in the Express make Britain's internal enemies all the more vigilant.

There are currently 16 D-notices in effect. None has been issued since Wilson took office in October 1964.

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