

Australia Questions Resurfaced Briton

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SYDNEY, Dec. 24—Within hours of being arrested in Melbourne, Australia, this morning, former British Cabinet minister John Stonehouse was closely questioned by police about his activities.

Stonehouse, 49, was carrying a false passport and identity documents, along with a considerable amount of money when he was detained by a squad of detectives who had been keeping him under surveillance for about two weeks.

The former Labor Party minister, whose disappear-

ance from a beach in Miami five weeks ago sparked an international search, will appear in court in Melbourne Thursday. He is charged with being an illegal immigrant under a holding warrant to allow the Australian government time to seek advice from the British government.

Melbourne police said this afternoon that Stonehouse traveled to Melbourne from Miami via Hawaii in late November using a false passport issued in the name of John D. Norman.

He stayed overnight in Melbourne and then, using the name Norman, he flew to Singapore, Copenhagen

and Beirut before reentering Australia at Perth on Dec. 10.

Since his disappearance there have been allegations in Britain that Stonehouse was blackmailed into working for Czechoslovak intelligence while holding positions as minister for aviation and later minister for posts and telecommunications in the 1964-70 Wilson government. The claims were made by Josef Frolík, a former Czechoslovak intelligence official who defected to the West in July 1969.

Last week, British Prime Minister Harold Wilson publicly ruled out the allegations linking Stonehouse to

the Czechoslovaks or to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. The prime minister admitted in a statement to the House of Commons, however, that following the defection of Frolík, a top-level security investigation was made of Stonehouse, but that he was cleared. Nevertheless, some British politicians and newspapers have questioned why Stonehouse, a high-flying Labor minister tapped by some as a future prime minister in the 1960s, was mysteriously dropped from the Labor front bench in 1970 without public explanation.

See STONEHOUSE, A38, Col. 1

Investigations have also shown that Stonehouse, who is still a member of Parliament, had a \$160,000 life insurance policy taken out on him by his wife shortly before his disappearance and that he was involved in multimillion dollar business deals, allegedly connected with arms-running to the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

Ironically, Stonehouse first came to the attention of Melbourne police because they suspected he might be the missing British aristocrat Lord Lucan wanted by Scotland Yard for murder and also believed to be hiding in Australia.

Police at Melbourne airport became suspicious of Stonehouse's travel documents, and a discreet surveillance was maintained. When he was detained this morning at a rented apartment in the exclusive Melbourne suburb of St. Kilda, Stonehouse denied at first that he was the missing Parliamentarian.

Chief Superintendent Mick Patterson later said that, during questioning, Stonehouse finally confessed after being shown photographs issued by Interpol last month.

Patterson added, "Stonehouse told me that the pressures of his life in Britain were becoming a little too much. He said he had decided to create a new personality and start a new life

in Australia."

The reference to pressures apparently alluded to the misfiring of his business undertakings. Stonehouse made a similar remark in a telegram of apologies he sent today to Prime Minister Wilson. The text, released by Wilson's office, read:

"Please convey to the prime minister my regrets that I have created this problem. And to all others concerned. The prime minister's statement in the House (of Commons) was correct.

"My wish was to release myself from the incredible pressures being put on me particularly in my business activities and various attempts at blackmail. I considered, clearly, wrongly, that the best action I could take was to create a new identity and attempt to live a new life away from these pressures.

"I suppose this can be summed up as a brainstorm, or a mental breakdown. I can only apologize to you and to all the others who have been troubled by this business.

"Again, thank you for your kind statement in the House."

According to police, Stonehouse telephoned his wife shortly after secretly returning to Australia on Dec. 10. Detectives who questioned him for more than four hours today reportedly concentrated on the espionage

allegations, which were first printed in English newspapers last week.

Police refused to indicate what had been said or how Stonehouse had reacted. Fraud squad investigators were also present during the questioning.

At one stage, Miami police believed that the missing Stonehouse had been murdered following the discovery of a concrete coffin near the beach where he disappeared. There was also speculation that Stonehouse had defected to Eastern Europe, committed suicide or drowned.

When arrested, Stonehouse was living unobtrusively in the city Center Club, a recently completed apartment building where he was registered as Donald Clive Mildoon.

Stonehouse got in his share of sunbathing, enjoying the Australian summer sun on the club roof, Mrs. Jean Wilcocks, the wife of the club manager told Reuter news agency.

He was "in and out a lot," Mrs. Wilcocks said. He attended a club cocktail party last week where he mingled among the guests "like a real politician," she said, concluding that he was "utterly charming."

The only other known activities by Stonehouse in Melbourne was his visits to the central post office where police said he frequently picked up mail.

Superintendent Paterson

said that Stonehouse had "a lot of money" on him when he was detained. Other police sources estimate that he had about \$2,600.

Melbourne police said that Stonehouse would appear in court on Thursday on the technical charges that he entered the country illegally. He is being held in jail until the court appearance.