

F Post 12.26.74

Stonehouse affair strange case

LONDON (AP) — The John Stonehouse affair, the strange case of the runaway British member of Parliament, became the subject Wednesday of a news analysis by Tass, the official Soviet News Agency.

The Tass dispatch from Moscow, monitored in London, said the discovery of Stonehouse in Melbourne, Australia, on Tuesday after he was missing five weeks, made bankrupt the claims of the section of the British press that sees Red spies under every bed.

Tass referred to press speculation that

the Labor party lawmaker might have been kidnaped or possibly defected to the East.

Stonehouse, 49, former postmaster-general, disappeared Nov. 20 from a Miami Beach, Fla., hotel after saying he was going for a swim.

At first he was assumed drowned, but when his body was not found, a worldwide manhunt began, ending in his apprehension in Melbourne. He was to appear in court there Thursday to face charges of illegally entering Australia by means of a false passport.

His lawyer said Wednesday that Stonehouse will make approaches to stay in Australia rather than return to his family and colleagues in Britain. Stonehouse was to make a full statement on his actions Thursday. He has nothing to hide and is willing to speak, the lawyer said.

Stonehouse cabled Prime Minister Harold Wilson to apologize for the embarrassment his disappearance caused. At one stage, Wilson felt compelled to make a statement to the House of Commons disclaiming press reports that Stonehouse was a spy.

In his cable, Stonehouse said he staged the disappearing act because of incredible business pressures and he cited various attempts at blackmail, not giving details, government informants said.

Stonehouse's friends and colleagues have said the handsome MP ran into big financial trouble recently, and the last straw may have been a \$15-million cement deal that fell through on his Florida trip.

His wife, Barbara, who made no direct comment after her husband's reappearance, said earlier that large insurance policies were taken out on his life recently.

In its report, Tass said: "The astounded Britishers were told that Stonehouse was a Red spy and had been kidnaped by a foreign intelligence service straight from the beach and minus his clothes—for speed's sake."

"They will probably now want to vacate his seat in Parliament as soon as possible," the Tass report concluded. "One way the Parliament can expel a member is if he becomes bankrupt. It looks as though this can be applied to Stonehouse."