

It's Legalized Eavesdropping

Aside from constitutional questions about unwarranted invasions of privacy in wiretapping procedures, which are awaiting answers in the courts, it may well be asked whether all that listening to telephone conversations can be justified by any standard of effective law enforcement and crime prevention.

More than 70,000 telephone conversations were monitored in Eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware in 1970 by authorization of court orders, according to a federal report. These include federally authorized wiretaps throughout the area and state-sanctioned wiretaps in New Jersey, one of 18 states where wiretapping within prescribed limitations is legal without federal court approval.

Mercer County, which includes Trenton, led the nation in legalized eavesdropping with wiretaps placed on 22,000 telephone conversations. Most of the 283 arrests that resulted were for

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How's That Again?

Marshal Lon Nol, whose 14-month tenure as Cambodian premier was never noted for wide popular support, has turned over the reins of government at Phnom Penh to a military sidekick, General Sirik Matak, with this farewell statement: "The whole nation must give its confidence to this high personality just as they have given it to me."

Apparently he's wishing the general luck—but we aren't sure what kind.

bookmaking and other gambling charges. Individual phones were monitored for periods up to 41 days.

All but 20 of the 88 arrests made in Eastern Pennsylvania as a result of wiretapping were for gambling offenses. In the tri-state area \$507,000 was spent on eavesdropping by telephone, with more than one-fourth of this amount spent on wiretaps that produced no arrests.

No doubt it is easier, especially on a cold or rainy day, to sit in a comfortable room somewhere and do detective work by wiretap, although listening to all those telephone conversations about private and personal affairs must usually be more dull than exciting. But we can't help wondering whether law-enforcement manpower and money could not be used more productively by methods involving less sitting and listening. Small-time bookies may be vulnerable to the wiretap but major criminals are not likely to be caught so easily.

When all the cloak-and-dagger window dressing is stripped away, the wiretaps are nothing more than an audio form of keyhole-peeping. The daily routines of private lives are exposed to inquisitive strangers. Presumably there are occasional opportunities for blackmail, and the victim could be a person making a telephone call rather than the one whose line is tapped.

With an average of more than 190 telephone calls monitored every day in the Delaware Valley, the chances are that someone is listening right now. Court sanction notwithstanding, it's a sordid business.