

Washington merry-go-round

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WASHINGTON — A chilling study for Congress suggests that Americans are closer to George Orwell's concept of 1984 than they may think.

Orwell described an advanced police state whose citizens couldn't make a move without the government knowing it.

With only nine years to go to 1984, the federal government may not yet be watching everyone, but it can concentrate an infinite variety of eyes and ears on anyone who arouses its suspicions.

A whole new arsenal of eavesdropping devices, according to the study, not only is available to government gumshoes but can be used with impunity.

For the 1968 law on the subject, thanks to the loose language drafted by law-and-order Sen. John McClellan, D.-Ark., places only the mildest restraints on the federal snoops.

The study was conducted by electronics consultant David Watters for Rep. Charles Mosher, D.-Ohio. Watters' unpublished, 140-page report describes a number of devices which have turned snooping into a sinister science.

Here are just a few ways, under the 1968 statute, that the government can intrude upon individual privacy:

Electronic "scanners" can sort through telegraph, telex and other written transmissions, pick out key words and then automatically reproduce the whole message, Watters reports.

Similar scanners can be used, according to the study, to intercept data, facsimile and video transmissions.

Devices known as "pen registers" can record the numbers dialed from a telephone, plus the date, time and length off the call.

"Certain exotic categories of switch and signal wiretapping equipment," states the Watters study, "(can) automatically sweep at high speed through thousands of communications circuits per hour searching for special signal address patterns." In other words, intricate equipment now available can scan whole communities, select out the call of a person under surveillance and automatically record the telephone data. Or, if the government wishes, the conversations can be recorded.

Unknown to the customers, many telephone calls are transmitted by microwaves which can be intercepted without even the telephone company knowing it.

Under the 1968 act, oral interceptions

are supposed to be forbidden. But the language refers only to the actual voices, not to the telephone data which can be intercepted without qualms.

As Watters puts it: "The citizen has no defense against the invasion of his privacy by switch and signal type telephone tapping."

With court permission — often no more than an okay from a go-along county magistrate — law agencies can engage in even more spectacular eavesdropping.

In the future, police in hideaways will be able to intercept laser beam transmissions and even pick up the minute impulses of computers and electric typewriters.

To protect privacy, the Watters report recommends that "all wiretapping in the United States should be limited to... the Federal Bureau of Investigation."

Even though the FBI has abused the law, it is still in Watters' opinion "the only agency in our country to whom we can safely entrust the privilege of intercepting wire and oral communications."

As a guard against FBI abuses, Watters would require the FBI to obtain a court warrant not only for routine wiretapping but for all other forms of electronic interceptions. Then after the eavesdropping had ended, the subjects would have to be notified and the eavesdroppers would have to be identified.

Congress is unlikely to go as far as Watters wishes. But Sen. Charles Mathias, R.-Md., and Rep. Charles Mosher have introduced legislation to close the most gaping loopholes in the 1968 law.

ENVIRONMENTAL WARFARE — We broke the astonishing news on March 18, 1971, that Air Force rainmakers had succeeded in turning the weather against the North Vietnamese.

We cited secret reports which "claimed success in creating manmade cloudbursts over the Ho Chi Minh trail complex." This "caused flooding conditions along the trails," we wrote, "making them impassable" and hampering the movement of military supplies.

This has now led to a Soviet-American agreement, soon to be announced, outlawing certain forms of environmental warfare. The details are still being hammered out, but both nations will pledge not to produce earthquakes, hurricanes and the like as weapons of war.

In the back rooms, the U.S. negotiators have acknowledged that our story was correct and that the weather makers produced cloudbursts over the trails.

They doubt, however, that the seeding

operations had a major impact on the weather. They believe it was merely a coincidence that North Vietnam in November, 1971, was lashed by the worst storms in four decades. Floods washed out roads, destroyed villages and caused more damage than four years of U.S. bombing.

But these storms, the experts insist, were produced by natural causes.

SPORTSCANDAL: The Securities and Exchange Commission is investigating a million-dollar controversy involving more than 100 of the nation's top professional athletes.

The inquiry was touched off by a lawsuit against Professional Sports Advisors, Inc., which represents a host of sports all-stars.

The suit was brought by three athletes — football star Otis Armstrong of the Denver Broncos and basketball stars Ralph Simpson and Mike Green of the Denver Nuggets — who claimed they had been bilked by a clever combination of land deals and tax frauds.

An attorney for PSA called the allegations "all lies" and pointed out that much of the suit has been dismissed. He contended that the litigation is part of a harassment campaign against his client by an unnamed rival organization.

The SEC, nevertheless, is checking into the land deals to determine whether any federal securities laws were violated.

The dismissed portion of the suit, filed in Cleveland federal court, alleged that \$1.2 million was collected from about 100 athletes and invested in a phony land scheme.

The list of investors reads like the starting line-up for an All-Star game.

In football, the firm represents such stars as Charlie Taylor and Ken Houston of the Washington Redskins, Mercury Morris and Larry Little of the Miami Dolphins and Terry Metcalf of the St. Louis Cardinals. Plaintiff Otis Armstrong led the American Football Conference in rushing last year.

In baseball, the client list includes Bobby Darwin of the Minnesota Twins, Greg Luzinski of the Philadelphia Phillies, Luis Tiant of the Boston Red Sox and Sandy Alomar and Elliot Maddox of the New York Yankees.

Footnote: The PSA attorney said he wanted to get into some "heavy discovery" to find out who was behind the "false charges," which he repeated were "instigated by others than the plaintiffs to discredit (PSA)." The SEC and the plaintiff's attorney declined comment.