

LBJ Curbs Use of Wiretap

By Jack Anderson

President Johnson doesn't want Government wiretappers to know it came from him, but he has ordered a halt to their habit of listening in on private conversations. The only exception: the Attorney General may sanction wiretaps in national security cases.



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The President has also demanded a complete inventory of all Government eavesdropping equipment.

His written instructions, contained in a confidential "Memo for Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies," were accompanied by a stern but strange warning that his name be kept out of the crack-down on Government eavesdropping.

In an accompanying letter, White House aide Lee White admonished agency heads: "The President is anxious that the attached memorandum, which is designated 'administratively confidential,' be regarded as such and that special efforts be made to respect the designation.

"In compiling the (inventory) requested in the final paragraph, there is no reason to indicate this information

has been requested by the President, and a memorandum under your signature to operating personnel need not indicate this is a Government-wide survey."

White House Bugged?

Insiders say the President fears his own office might be bugged. He is less worried that enemy agents might be able to break presidential security than that one of his own Federal agencies might attempt an inside job in a misguided effort to keep tabs on him.

A former Army intelligence agent, Willis Adams, disclosed last month that he had monitored private conversations of the late Eleanor Roosevelt while she was First Lady. This column has learned that the Army tried to deliver a recording of a conversation between Mrs. Roosevelt and a security suspect to the FBI, which refused even to listen to it.

This column has also learned that listening devices recently were discovered in the offices of two U.S. Senators. They were found by Federal Communications Commission engineers who had been asked by Sen. Ed Long (D-Mo.) as part of his investigation into Government eavesdropping, to check various Senatorial offices for electronic snoopers.

There were no clues to indicate who had planted the devices.

LBJ's Secret Memo

President Johnson used blunt language in his confidential memo to agency heads.

"I am strongly opposed," he wrote, "to the interception of telephone conversations as a general investigative technique. I recognize that mechanical and electronic devices may sometimes be essential in protecting our national security.

"Nevertheless, it is clear that indiscriminate use of these investigative devices to overhear telephone conversations without the knowledge or consent of any persons involved could result in serious abuses and invasions of privacy.

"In my view, the invasion of privacy of communications is a highly offensive practice which should be engaged in only where the national security is at stake. To avoid any misunderstanding on this subject in the Federal Government, I am establishing the following basic guidelines to be followed by all Government agencies:

"1. No Federal personnel is to intercept telephone conversations within the United States by any mechanical or electronic devices without the consent of the parties involved (except in connection

with investigations relating to the national security)

"2. No interceptions shall be undertaken or continued without first obtaining the approval of the Attorney General.

"3. All Federal agencies shall immediately conform their practices and procedures to the provision of this order.

Eavesdropping Permits

"Utilization of mechanical or electronic devices to overhear non-telephone conversations is an even more difficult problem, which raises substantial and unresolved questions of Constitutional interpretation.

"I desire that each agency conducting such investigations consult the Attorney General to ascertain whether the agency's practices are fully in accord with the law and with a decent regard for the rights of others.

"Every agency head shall submit to the Attorney General within 30 days a complete inventory of all mechanical and electronic equipment and devices used for or capable of intercepting telephone conversations.

"In addition, such reports shall contain a list of any interceptions currently authorized and the reasons for them."

The next problem will be to get the private tappers off the telephone lines.

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