

Probers' Findings

Federal Spying on Cables

Washington

For years government agents have been secretly monitoring and photographing private international cables to and from Washington, House investigators have found.

Agents of either the FBI or the National Security Agency, it is understood, visited the offices of RCA Global Communications, Inc., here at 3 a.m. each day to read all the international cables and photograph ones that interested them. The practice reportedly continued until May of this year.

Similarly, the investigation found, FBI agents visited the Washington offices of ITT World Communications each day and collected copies of all cable traffic to and from a selected list of countries.

The daily collection of ITT cables, investigators were told, would be picked up around 11 a.m. and returned in mid-afternoon.

The findings became known in the wake of a tumultuous hearing before a House Government Operations subcommittee headed by Bella S. Abzug (Dem.-N.Y.).

Attorney General Edward Levi made a last-minute attempt to head off the hearing. Abzug said Levi invoked fears for national security and protested that the testimony might taint the possibility of criminal prosecutions.

Dismissing Levi's complaints as groundless generalizations, Mrs. Abzug said she had no intention of compromising national security. She said an investigation by the subcommittee staff had turned up plenty of legitimate grist for public hearings, such as "violations of individual rights, the Constitution, the Fourth

Amendment and the Federal Communications Act."

Commercial cable traffic to and from the United States, including messages between embassies here and their governments around the world, have been monitored routinely at least since World War II, Mrs. Abzug said.

The star witness at the hearing was expected to be Joe R. Craig, the FBI's liaison man with telegraph company officials in the Washington area for about a decade before his retirement last year.

Craig, however, was ordered not to testify by FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley, apparently on the strength of a secrecy agreement required of all FBI agents.

Witnesses from RCA Global Communications and ITT World Communications also had been scheduled to appear, but Mrs. Abzug said she was notified "only a day or so ago" that they would not appear unless subpoenaed.

After long and loud wrangling between Chairman Abzug and Representative Sam Steiger (Rep.-Ariz.), the subcommittee voted 5 to 3 to go ahead with the hearing.

Only two witnesses were heard. William Caming, chief spokesman for the American Telephone & Telegraph Co. on wiretapping and electronic surveillance, and Earl Connor, security supervisor for the Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Co.

Officials of Western Union and Western Union International were standing by but were not called.

Making public only a brief summary of the subcommittee staff findings, Mrs. Abzug said they would indicate that both "the FBI and NSA have apparently

engaged in illegal and unconstitutional interception and copying of private communications sent by private individuals."

The practices, Mrs. Abzug added, included:

- "The physical examination of all cables in the Washington office of RCA Global Communications Inc.

- "The physical examination of all cables to and from selected countries in the Washington office of ITT World Communications (a subsidiary of IT&T).

- "The securing from cable companies of Telex 'line channel' numbers which, with telephone company cooperation, permit interception of all Telex traffic on those lines."

(Telex messages involve the transmission of written communications over normal telephone lines. Telex is widely used by private businesses in communicating in a network of offices, such as a newspaper and its bureaus. News stories, for example, are routinely transmitted by Telex. They can be intercepted in the same way in which a telephone line is tapped.)

Mrs. Abzug gave no other details, but it was learned later that the subcommittee staff has interviewed a number of potential witnesses, including Craig and past and present cable company employees.

ITT officials reportedly are defending the practice as a legal offshoot of counter-intelligence activity, but the subcommittee staff apparently feels this doesn't justify the blanket interception of private cables.

The telephone officials said it is company policy not to know or ask about "the nature of the national security investigation"