

No One Laughs Now at French Bugging Scandal

By NAN ROBERTSON
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PARIS, Dec. 16 — It began, like Watergate, as a "caper"—the entire country laughing at the entire country laughing at a botched break-in, bugging, the miscreants caught in the act on the enemy's turf. Now it is not so silly.

Twelve days after the accidental discovery of men installing a sophisticated wiretapping system in the new offices of Le Canard Enchaîné, one of Europe's most famous satirical newspapers, the Government is coming under heavy fire.

The French counter espionage agency has been implicated. The Canard has named a dozen officials in the agency's employ that it said were involved in the undercover operation.

Raymond Marcellin, the Interior Minister, who is in charge of internal security, is in deep trouble. From the political left, right and center, members of Parliament and editorials are calling for his resignation. A court investigation has begun.

A Long-Time Needle

The Canard, which for more than half a century has gleefully documented political gossip and exposed Government scandals that others dared not print, was the object of the bugging attempt.

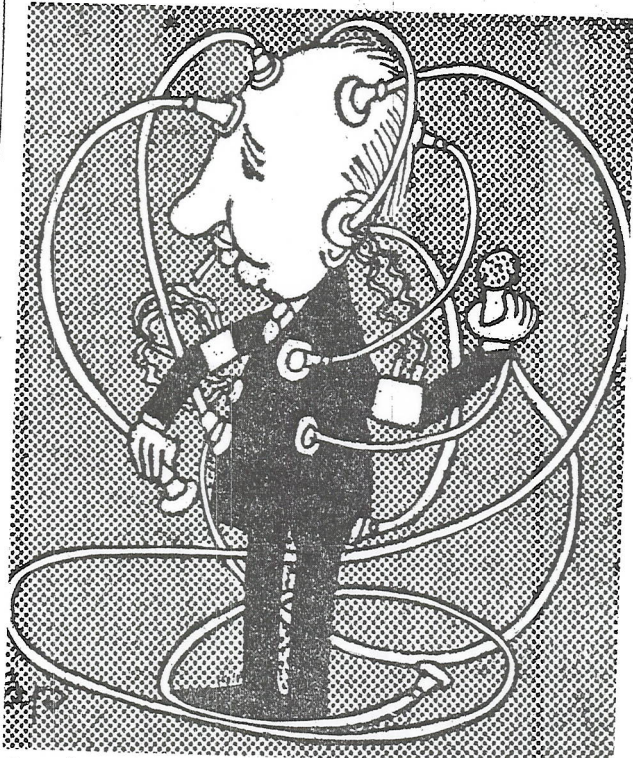
It was first thought to be a practical joke by the weekly's madcap but devastatingly well-informed staff. But the affair is now being taken seriously much faster than Watergate was.

Initially snuffy Government reaction has changed almost overnight to defensiveness. When the news broke on Dec. 4, Premier Pierre Messmer said: "It's a story in the style of a satirical newspaper. They could have done it themselves." La Nation, the Gaullist organ, dismissed it as a "publicity stunt" dreamed up by the Canard.

Mr. Marcellin was suddenly confined to bed with fever the next day, when he was to explain his budget before a clamoring National Assembly. The Canard suggested that it might be an inflammation of the ear.

Developments quickened this week. Experts confirmed that the listening devices installed in the offices, the Canard is soon to occupy were highly sophisticated. They compared the equipment to systems discovered at the United States Embassy in Moscow and, more recently, the French Embassy in Warsaw.

Then the Canard published the names of the intelligence officials it said were involved. The intelligence service answers directly to Mr. Marcellin. At that point the Interior



Drawing of Minister Raymond Marcellin from Canard

Minister declared that he knew nothing of the matter and had given no orders about bugging the satirical newspaper to anybody, including the intelligence bureau's director, Henri Biard.

On Friday, Mr. Marcellin said in Parliament that there were "machinations" at the bottom of the Canard affair, a "political settling of accounts." Turning to the Opposition benches, he shouted: "You're out to destroy me and not to spare me! I won't spare you either!"

The Interior Minister is a be-

liever in the conspiracy theory of history. After the upheavals of 1968, he published a booklet with the thesis that the French and other European student uprisings that year had all been masterminded in Havana.

Mr. Marcellin's resignation should the Canard's accusations be confirmed, has been demanded by many newspapers. They include the independent and influential Le Monde and the conservative Le Figaro, which usually supports the Government.

The nationwide indignation aroused by the attempt to wiretap the Canard is surprising. The French attitude toward the Watergate revelations was one of almost universal indifference until President Nixon ousted the special prosecutor Archibald Cox.

Moreover, two investigations this year into widespread and systematic Government tapping and bugging of the conversations of French citizens—which the Government admitted—sank without a trace after the results were disclosed.

Whatever the climate, the Government has remained intransigent. The Minister for Parliamentary relations, Joseph Comiti, said that the wiretapping controversy was only "one of the aspects of a systematic campaign of denigration against the authority of the state."

Tapping Will Continue

He added that despite the Canard affair, the Government had not the slightest intention of modifying its position: "Wiretapping will continue to be used to assure the security of the state, the safeguarding of the institutions of the republic, the prevention of crime and the protection of individuals."

Shortly after Mr. Comiti's speech, the National Assembly—where the Gaullists hold a comfortable majority—rejected a proposal to create a committee to investigate wiretapping, though by an unexpectedly narrow margin.

Meanwhile at the Canard circulation has soared from 453,000 12 days ago to 880,035 in this week's edition.

One of their reports said that staff members were now talking in sign language only.