

FBI Wants More Power To Wiretap

Washington

The FBI told a House panel yesterday that it is blocked under current law and court decisions from wiretapping U.S. terrorist-type groups like the Symbionese Liberation Army.

To solve this, Edward S. Miller, the No. 3 man in the FBI, told a House judiciary subcommittee that the agency would propose changes in the law to allow what he called domestic intelligence taps.

The targets, Miller said, would be "people who are talking about revolution, people who are talking about terrorism. Bombings are in this category."

The problem, Miller said, is that to get court or Department of Justice authorization for taps, FBI agents must demonstrate probable cause that a crime has been, or will be, committed.

But in domestic intelligence, Miller said, the telephone talk and group activity is abstract, with no suggestion that a particular crime has or will take place.

On the SLA in particular, Miller said "we would have liked to have had intelligence information to resolve that situation. Taps may have helped."

However, Miller said that since the SLA headquarters were not known, the taps would have had to deal with secondary persons who may have had dealings with the SLA.

In his other testimony, Miller said:

- The FBI does not take part in any overseas wiretapping activity.
- The names of some people who happen to be recorded talking to wiretap targets are often kept in FBI files.
- So-called government abuses of surveillance laws "are greatly overplayed."

Associated Press