

Giscard Bans Wiretaps, Press Curbs

Paris

President Valery Giscard d'Estaing yesterday launched a more liberal regime in France, banning all government wiretapping operations and press restraints and welcoming political refugees.

Deepening the break with the Gaullist past, he told the first cabinet session of his new government: "We are here to change France . . . France is a liberal country and we must set our sights even more firmly in that direction."

He was surrounded at the Elysee Palace meeting by a 16-member cabinet that contained none of the big-name Gaullists who had helped rule France for the past 16 years.

Giscard d'Estaing singled out the fights against inflation and for greater social justice as the first priorities of the new government.

He warned ministers to cut down on ponderous bureaucracy, announcing he was slashing the Elysee staff from 464 to fewer than 300.

Secret telephone tapping, an acknowledged part of Gaullist government policy which rebounded disastrously against the late President Georges Pompidou, will be ended, Giscard said.

Together with the wiretapping ban, the new president ordered the destruction of all dossiers compiled against individuals on the basis of past secret listening operations.

The liberalizing measures were announced to newsmen by Interior Minister Michel Poniatowski, who said Giscard d'Estaing also promised to develop France's image as a home for political refugees and to rule out restraints on the press involving the presidency.

In the past, disdainful comments or very abrasive remarks about the president have been punishable by fines. The new president said he would take no action against such attacks.

Reuters