

Policy 'Conflict'

Mitchell's Views On News Notes

Washington

Attorney General John N. Mitchell said yesterday he would not object to legislation protecting news reporters' notes from being subpoenaed in legal proceedings.

Mitchell acknowledged in a television interview that the confidentiality of information obtained by reporters contributes to the dissemination of news.

He also said there are no militant groups that pose a serious threat to the American form of government, a statement that seemingly conflicts with at least one Justice Department policy regarding wiretapping.

LAW

Mitchell was interviewed by Mike Wallace of CBS and was asked if he would like to see a law passed guaranteeing the confidentiality of reporters' notes. "I would have no problem with that," he answered, even though in some instances it might "impair the administration of justice."

That seemed to reflect a difference of opinion within the Justice Department because early this year U.S. attorneys sought subpoenas for reporters' notes and film clips in investigations of

Black Panthers and white radical groups in Chicago and San Francisco.

The Department was widely criticized by news media which contended that sources of news would be cut off if reporters could be forced to divulge confidential information.

RULING

In San Francisco, a Justice Department lawyer argued that a New York Times reporter should be required to testify before a grand jury investigating the Black Panthers. However, a U.S. district judge ruled that the reporter should not be required to reveal confidential information in the absence of "an overriding national interest."

On the subject of militant domestic organizations, Mitchell said, "generally, I would say that I don't believe that there is any militant group in this country that is a real threat to the United States as far as its institu-

tions are concerned, or as far as the continuation of our form of government."

He agreed that such groups "don't have the muscle, either by numbers or any of the other requirements that would be necessary to materially effect our government."

WIRETAP

Some violence-prone groups are "extremely disruptive," he said, but their actions "will have no long-term effect on the continuance of our government."

That appeared to conflict with the department's present wiretapping policies as advocated in court. In at least one case, Mitchell has advocated legalized eavesdropping "to protect the nation from attempts by domestic organizations to use unlawful means to attack and subvert the existing structure of government."

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