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Bonn Is Talking About

Electronic Spies

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Chronicle Foreign Service

Bonn

BONN is bugged. Several thousand electronic espionage devices are planted in government offices, industry conference rooms and private homes.

Even Chancellor Willy Brandt's office is reportedly infested with mini-bugs the size of a shirt-button and generals in Bonn's defense Ministry have them planted in their rooms.

These charges were made recently by West Germany's leading illustrated weekly "Stern."

Stern claims the electronic spies are hidden in telephones, ashtrays and pens, behind walls and carpets, glued to conference tables and concealed in radios.

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DEPENDING on their size, they transmit even whispered conversations to receivers up to 500 yards away. On the receiving side are German and Allied spy-hunters, Communist intelligence operatives, private detectives, police, political parties and even jealous husbands.

"It is difficult to keep a secret in Bonn," the magazine claimed, "wherever decisions are made, the bugs are there listening in."

"Of course we know the bugs are here," apologized Minister of Interior Hans-Dietrich



Genscher, "and the security officials detect some. But many are bound to be overlooked."

"And what do you do when you detect a bug?" a curious reporter persisted.

"Nothing. Because if we announce having found one, then the snoopers replace it with a new one," the minister answered resignedly.

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ONE "Stern" reporter spent two days at a high-rise hotel overlooking the government quarters using a normal, low-priced transistor radio to eaves-drop on bug frequencies. The only alteration to the radio

was done at a repair store "for ten Mark's" (\$2.75) spreading the FM wave-band to 170 megahertz.

On a normal cassette recorder he taped a telephone conversation made from the chancellor's office, listened to a duty-call by an Air Force general at the Defense Ministry, monitored a conversation between two businessmen discussing a \$137,000 deal and heard conversations from the federal press and information office and the foreign ministry.

All that within half a mile of Bonn's government quarters and all discovered more or less by chance by fiddling around with a cheap radio for five hours during two days.

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IF THERE were any doubts about the presence of bugs, proof was readily available in the form of 150,000 recorded sales of the eaves-dropping devices in the past year in Germany.

Selling and possessing the bugs is not illegal. Only "putting them into use" is punishable under law. And sentencing depends on whether they were used for pranks, violation of privacy or treason. Punishment ranges from a warning and reprimand to a couple of years in jail.