

Checks on Snoops

Although the Watergate irregulars gave unregulated snooping in the name of national security a black eye, no better safeguards than the unchecked judgment of the Attorney General and the Federal Bureau of Investigation against more such abuses have yet been developed by the Congress. If the case for erecting tighter safeguards needed additional support, it received it last week when a House subcommittee heard testimony about a warrantless wiretap on a person's phone which was maintained for twenty-five years. The panel also was told about the tapping of forty conversations between a lawyer and his clients, presumably on the ground that some of those clients were Arab students, and the interception by Army agents overseas of a host of conversations between lawyers and their clients.

Senator Charles Mathias of Maryland and Representative Charles Mosher of Ohio have introduced a bill that would require all Federal agents to obtain warrants, even in national security cases, before initiating electronic surveillance, inspection of bank and credit records, opening of mail or entry of dwellings.

The proposed legislation may not contain all the answers to improper governmental intrusions on privacy, but the assertion of Congressional responsibility over all of the executive's surveillance authority is a large step in the right direction.