

Such Things Are Not Done Here, He Said

By Susan Davidson

WASHINGTON—I heartily agree with President Nixon's position in the State of the Union Address: "One measure of a truly free society is the vigor with which it protects the liberties of its individual citizens" and that "as technology has advanced in America, it has increasingly encroached on one of those liberties; what I term the right of personal privacy."

I note with great interest that the President went on to say that "the time has come" to "erect new safeguards to insure" that the right of privacy is respected. I agree, but for some of us it's a bit late.

In 1969 my husband's home telephone was wiretapped at the direction of this President. As I used our telephone far more than he, I, too, was being tapped. And I'm outraged.

At the time, I had suspected that we were tapped because of clicks and changes in volume on the line. When I mentioned this to my husband, he accused me of being slightly paranoid

and said that such things were not done in this country.

Long before I knew for certain that we were tapped, I had become very concerned about the lack of privacy in this country. Must we know everything about each other? Is there no sense of decency left?

Perhaps I'm more upright than most people about privacy. I feel very strongly that the public does not need to know whether or not Governor Wallace is able to move his bowels voluntarily and I do not believe that the Government has a right to have access to a private citizen's or a Vice-Presidential candidate's medical records, and to mail, personal belongings, personal relationships, or conversations (on the telephone or other). These are, or should be, very private personal matters.

Under no circumstances whatsoever would I read mail addressed to someone else, open another woman's purse, look at someone's address book or medicine chest, open a door without knocking, or eavesdrop. These are basic principles of common decency instilled in me since childhood.

Thinking back on the time when

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our phone was tapped, for national security purposes so I am told, I'm trying to remember what I was doing in those days. My husband worked for the Government on sensitive national security affairs and I was working on television documentaries, one on the subject of zoos and the other on rivers—of great importance to the national security, no doubt.

Whom did I talk to over the phone? I would have spoken to my husband (possibly and probably about very private matters), family, friends, tradepeople, not to mention an inordinate amount of gossiping with friends. The fact that these conversations were recorded or monitored live and presump-

ably transcribed offends and infuriates me. I cringe at the thought of the imposition on those people with whom we talked while being tapped.

The wags must be wondering what "dirt" I have to hide. My answer is, plenty, because I regard conversations over the telephone as conversations between two people and no one else's business whatsoever. My arguments with my cousin and the car-repair shop, dinner-party post-mortems, or whatever, should be completely private and, to my thinking, if heard by another party automatically become dirt.

Wives whose husbands choose to serve their country have to make many sacrifices, while enjoying some rewards. We involuntarily forfeited the right to privacy and the right to be left alone. Why should public servants be subjected to the illegality of wiretapping? On what authority did we have to endure this unconscionable deprivation of civil rights?

Susan Davidson, who was born in England, became a United States citizen in 1964. Her husband, Daniel L. Davidson, was a member of the staff of the National Security Council.