



Department of Justice

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ADDRESS

BY

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BEFORE

THE AMERICAN LAW INSTITUTE

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To start with what may seem far afield of whatever subject I have, I should like to refer to an article by Professor James McGann in a magazine called "Critical Inquiry." That article, which is on the function of criticism, builds upon the work of Professor Harold Bloom in a series of essays published a few years ago under the title "Ringers in the Tower," with the subtitle "Studies in Romantic Tradition." Bloom's essay on Ruskin as Literary Critic provides McGann with material for exhibiting a central conflict. The conflict concerns the role of the critic. The conflict is between the virtue of accuracy and the virtue of the "more imaginative act of vision." As to the virtue of accuracy, Ruskin is quoted as saying: "The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and to tell what he saw in a plain way." But Ruskin as a prophet, as he grew older, was more captured by the apocalyptic yearnings of mankind, in which seeing becomes an act of prophecy, a penetration into the "life of things," a finding of the truth of imagination. McGann describes the force of this conflict upon Ruskin as finally bringing on what Ruskin described as the Storm Cloud of his later years, when he was beset by a special madness.

I trust I may be forgiven for borrowing this fugitive material so imperfectly from a sister branch of the humanities.

The problem of the conflict is one with which law is fully familiar. We are well aware of the duty and difficulties of attaining accurate description, and the importance of the craftsmanship of detail. We also know that the foreseeability inherent in our judgments lurks in all the ambiguities, not only of speech, but of what we in fact see, or wish to have accomplished. So the Restatement of Law often cannot help but be--and sometimes is intended to be--a predictor--some would say a vision--of better things to come. I do not suggest that this should lead us, as perhaps it did Ruskin, to almost total incapacitation. We are accustomed to the problem. Our system of law is arranged so that we can argue about what we see or ought to see.

You may indeed wonder, as I have, what has brought me to the idea of the suitability of this story about a somewhat mad genius and his view of art, as appropriate for this occasion. The answer is that a major problem for government today, a major problem for the vitality of a democracy, and a major problem for the administration of justice is the achievement of a shared and accurate perception of events and problems. But the accuracy is most difficult to attain. In an age of most extensive and rapid communication, somehow accuracy gets lost. In an age of creativity in the law, our perception of what the problem is can be clouded by the very techniques which have been used to make change possible.

All of this is perhaps a prologue to some obvious concerns which I have. One concern, which I believe is of general importance, is the image of the Department of Justice. It is well enough to say that in the long run it is the reality and not the image which counts, but because of past events and because of the ways of our present society, the reality can become lost in the constant stream of images which may be quite false.

It is with some diffidence that I illustrate this problem. But I want to give two recent examples. The first comes from an article by I. F. Stone in the New York Review of Books. Mr. Stone wrote, "It is depressing that despite all we now know Attorney General Levi has rejected recommendations from within the Department for an independent citizens' investigation of the (Martin Luther) King assassination and insists on turning it back for another self-inquiry by the FBI." Stone was trying to make a point, but his facts were wrong. The investigation of whether the FBI was involved in any way in the assassination of Dr. King has not been turned over to the FBI. I have assigned Michael Shaheen, the Department of Justice Counsel on Professional Responsibility, to recruit a number of attorneys and others to investigate that issue thoroughly and independently and to report their conclusions and recommendations to me. I have also directed Mr. Shaheen to investigate whether the FBI's investigation into

the assassination was thorough and honest, whether any information concerning the assassination has come to the attention of the Department which should be dealt with by appropriate authorities, and whether the nature of the relationship between the Bureau and Dr. King calls for prosecution, disciplinary proceedings or other appropriate action.

The second illustration derives from one of the reports of the Senate Select Committee to Study Government Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities. In the first paragraph of its report on Warrantless Surreptitious Entries, the Committee included this sentence: "Since 1960, more than five hundred warrantless surreptitious microphone installations against intelligence and internal security targets have been conducted by the FBI, a technique which the Justice Department still permits." The careful or unintended ambiguity in that sentence conveyed a misimpression which was widespread when reported by the media. It could easily be read, and doubtless was read by some, to mean that the Department of Justice still conducts warrantless electronic surveillance against "internal security" targets--that is, domestic groups perceived to be a threat to national security. The Supreme Court decision in United States v. United States District Court, however, prohibited warrantless electronic surveillance of targets unconnected with foreign powers. The Department of Justice does not use warrantless electronic surveillance against

anyone who is not the agent of a foreign power. One of the first things I did when I came to the Department of Justice was to try to be clear about the policy in this area. I discussed it time and again. To make the point that domestic security surveillance was not involved, I stated on July 9, 1975, that at that time there was no warrantless surveillance directed at an American citizen. This has been true for the entire period since that time as well. It should be no surprise, and hardly news, that the Department of Justice does engage in warrantless electronic surveillance under strict procedures. Former Attorney General Richardson announced that policy in a September 12, 1973, letter to Senator Fulbright after the decision in United States v. United States District Court. On numerous occasions I have announced the number of warrantless electronic surveillances that have been authorized, each time stressing that they are directed only against agents of foreign powers. The Department engages in warrantless electronic surveillance because of the curious shape of the law in this area which assumes that the Department will undertake this activity. I have said that the state of the law is unfortunate and should be clarified by legislation, executive policy-making and court decisions. Misleading statements such as the Committee's reference to internal security surveillances make this clarification difficult.

Such statements, which are fairly typical and for which I assess no blame because they are to be expected in the way things work, reflect undoubtedly a noble objective. Perhaps they are intended to look beyond the details to the spirit. But they mislead and they disfigure. They impede the work of reconstruction.

Most difficult in the process of reconstruction are those areas of law and administration where basic individual rights and bona fide national security are involved. In these areas it is essential that the government take special precautions to be thoughtful and knowledgeable about what it does. The scrutiny is made more difficult because the informed reactions which would otherwise come from the society at large either do not come or are distorted because of the long term effects of secrecy.

As far as electronic surveillance for foreign intelligence, we must recognize that we are dealing with practices and procedures of government that have been kept in relative secrecy for 36 years. Each Attorney General since Attorney General Jackson--along with Congress and the courts--has played a role in one way or another in carrying on or creating the present system. Faced with this problem my associates and I determined that, while we knew it would be an extremely difficult task, the best course would be to achieve legislation in this area.

The President some weeks ago announced that he was seeking bipartisan support for the legislation. The Department has worked with members of both parties in the Senate and the House and has consulted with a number of distinguished lawyers and legal scholars, some of whom are present today. It is often said that while present administration practices with respect to warrantless electronic surveillance may be sufficiently protective of individual rights, there is no assurance that these practices will continue. The legislation will meet this concern. It is innovative. It is a step no administration has ever taken before. And because I think it is so extremely important, I want to impose upon you at this time to bring some of its details to your attention.

The bill provides for a suitable judicial warrant procedure by which applications specifically authorized by the Attorney General in each case, under general authorization by the President, would be made to one of seven district court judges designated by the Chief Justice. Appeals from a denial of the warrant application would be taken to a special court of appeals made up of a presiding judge and two other judges designated by the Chief Justice. The United States would have the right to appeal an affirmance of denial to the Supreme Court. The bill would provide for electronic surveillance for the gathering of foreign intelligence information which is defined as: first, information relating to the ability of the United States to protect itself from actual or potential attack or other hostile acts of a foreign power; or second, information with

respect to foreign powers or territories which, because of its importance, is deemed essential to the security or national defense of the nation or to the conduct of the foreign affairs of the United States; or third, information relating to the ability of the United States to protect the national security against foreign intelligence activities. The judge would receive a certification by an appropriate Presidential appointee that the information sought is foreign intelligence information as defined. The judge would be authorized to issue a warrant if he finds probable cause to believe that the subject of the interception is a foreign power or an agent of a foreign power. Foreign power is defined as including "foreign governments, factions of a foreign government, foreign parties, foreign military forces, enterprises controlled by such entities, or organizations composed of such entities, whether or not recognized by the United States, or foreign-based terrorist groups." Special protection is accorded United States citizens and permanent resident aliens in the definition of agent of a foreign power, which is as follows: "a person who is not a permanent resident alien or citizen of the United States and who is an officer or employee of a foreign power; or . . . a person who, pursuant to the direction of a foreign power, is engaged in clandestine intelligence activities, or who conspires with, or knowingly aids or abets such a person in engaging in such activities."

It has been urged that at least as to citizens and permanent resident aliens, even if they are clandestine intelligence agents of a foreign power, there should be no electronic surveillance absent a showing of probable cause that a crime has been or is about to be committed. The bill does not adopt that approach. The espionage laws simply do not make all clandestine intelligence activities undertaken on behalf of a foreign power criminal. To change them to encompass all such activities would be difficult and could make the espionage laws too broad. The spirit behind the suggestion that electronic surveillance for foreign intelligence be tied strictly to violations of law derives, I suppose, from a perceived need for complete symmetry between this area and the traditional law enforcement area. But the symmetry may not be possible in the working out of the details of policy, no matter how inviting it may be in its spirit.

In addition to the probable cause requirement, the bill provides that the judge must also be convinced that "minimization procedures to be followed are reasonably designed to minimize the acquisition and retention of information relating to permanent resident aliens or citizens of the United States that is not foreign intelligence information." Thus we have tried to limit both the scope of acquisition and the retention of overheard information.

We recognize that there may be an argument that the limited sort of determinations to be made by judges under this legislation might not be appropriate judicial business. The bill follows what we regard as the implied suggestions of Justice Lewis Powell in the Almedia-Sanchez and Keith cases that special warrant procedures can be fashioned to meet the unique circumstances that arise in this area.

The bill defines electronic surveillance as the interception of radio communications that begin and end in the United States and all wiretap and microphone surveillances within the United States. This definition does not include intelligence gathering by sophisticated electronic means directed at international communications. For this reason, the bill contains a section concerning Presidential power.

Title III of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 included a proviso reserving the President's power to conduct warrantless electronic surveillance for certain described purposes. The Supreme Court, in United States v. United States District Court wrote that Congress, by this proviso in Title III, left Presidential power where it found it. It held that there was no Presidential power to conduct warrantless electronic surveillance of individuals or groups which have no foreign connection. In the latest version of the legislative proposal the section concerning Presidential power states that nothing in the bill or in the Communications Act of 1934 "shall be deemed to affect the exercise of any

constitutional power the President may have to acquire foreign intelligence information if (a) such acquisition does not come within the definition of electronic surveillance in the bill, "or, (b) the facts and circumstances giving rise to the acquisition are so unprecedented and potentially harmful to the nation that they cannot be reasonably said to have been within the contemplation of Congress in enacting this chapter." The first part of this section is meant to leave untouched a program of surveillance of international communications which simply does not fit the kind of analysis and system this bill would impose. This is not to say that legislation is impossible nor that safeguards cannot be designed and implemented. Special protective procedures are already in effect. But an effort to treat this program in the context of the proposed bill would not be useful. The second half of the section of the bill concerning Presidential power represents the lawyer's concern for providing for all possible eventualities. This may seem akin to the vision of the apocalyptic poet, but it serves an important purpose. By stating a provision to provide for a situation of utmost danger, one also narrowly and carefully delimits what it is that can be considered as such a situation in the future. It is at least as important as a guarantee that the standards and procedures in the bill will be followed in all foreseeable circumstances as it is as a hedge against the unforeseeable.

One other feature of the bill has raised some questions-- the lack of a notice requirement such as the one included in Title III. While there may be some disagreement about this, the special nature of the foreign intelligence field, when foreign powers or their intelligence agents are involved, makes such notice inappropriate. Notice would destroy sensitive investigations, cause great risks to individuals cooperating with the investigations and sometimes have other serious implications. While it is not possible to convince everyone on this point, I believe most will recognize the validity of these reasons.

The proposed legislation covers an area that until now has been thought not to be amenable to statutory control. That generally has been the position for 36 years. I believe that if enacted it will be an important step in the restatement, reshaping and advancement of the law. If it is not enacted, I fear much time may pass before another legislative effort goes forward.

I need hardly tell the American Law Institute that the law does not just simply clarify itself. The clarification requires a willingness to raise issues, to confront problems, to articulate principles, to test these principles through their meaning in application. Many of the problems with which the law deals raise the most complex social issues; they have been surrounded with controversy. They must be approached

with care and responsibility. The difficulties can be enormous. But if our law is to be a vital and responsive force--if indeed it is to be a rule of law--then we must not hide from the hard questions. We can only hope that the spirit of candor and thoughtfulness with which these issues are approached will be understood. Let me add that for many of these areas, the work of the American Law Institute itself has helped and can help to lead the way. There is, I think, a great deal for all of us to do.