



Exploding The Phone

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Bibliographic Cover Sheet

Title **Can the phone phreaks phreak the Post Office?**

Publication *Inside Story magazine*

Date 1972-00-00

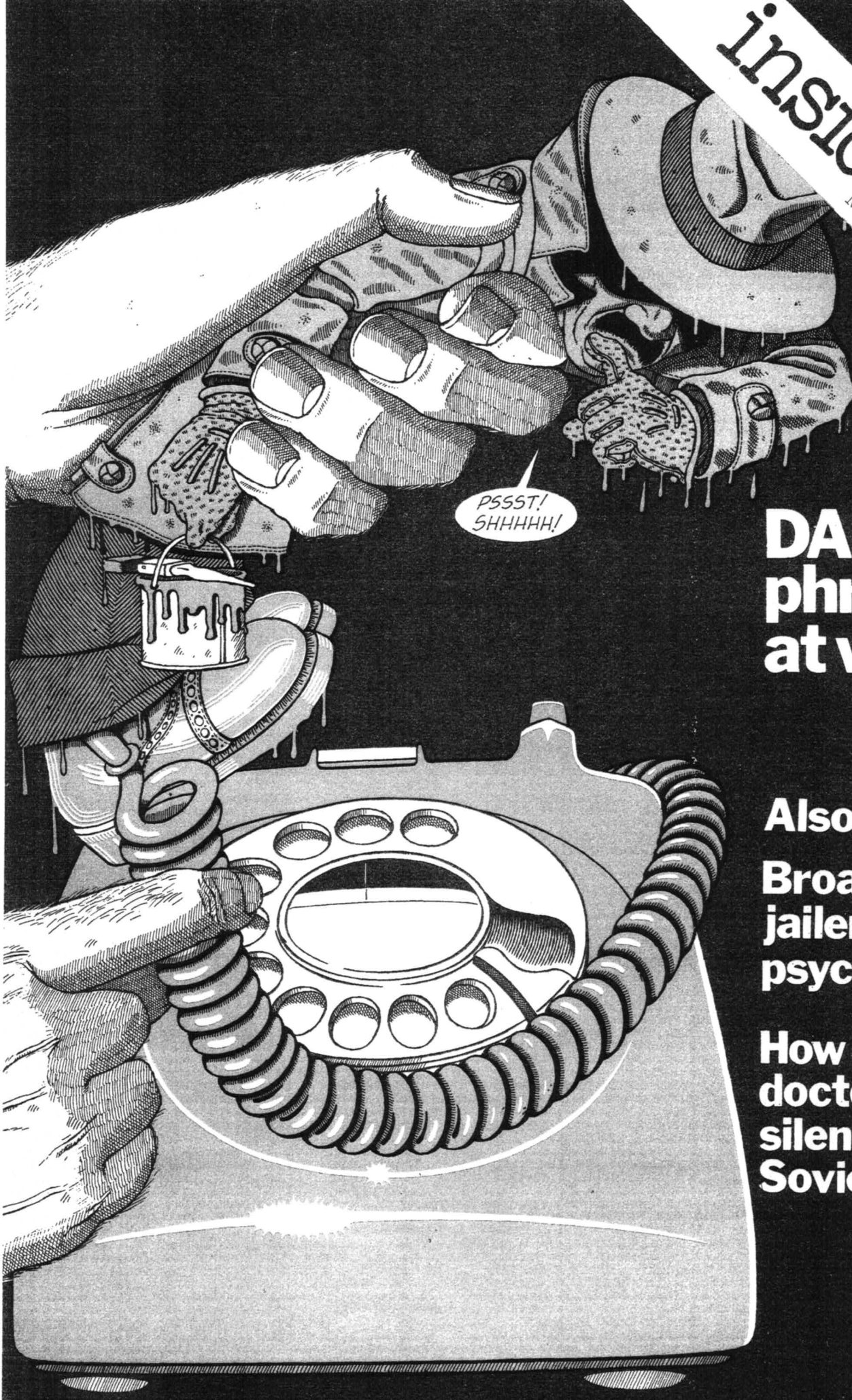
V/I/P No. 6

Abstract Overview of British Post Office and phone phreaking. Discusses revenues, equipment upgrades and the arrest of the "telephone enthusiasts" in 1972. Describes "People's Power Pamphlet 1" which is a modified version of the Ramparts black box article. Includes reprint of the Ramparts suppression article from July, 1972 Ramparts.

Keywords black box; British phreaking; British Post Office (BPO); Ramparts magazine

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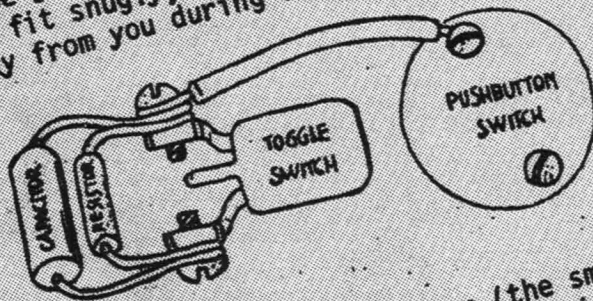


DANGER: phreaks at work

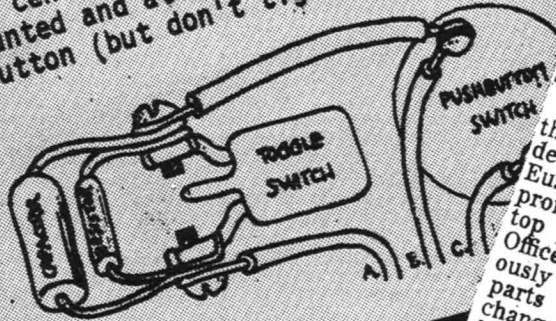
**Also:
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doctors stay
silent on
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2. Make a small hole less than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in diameter (it should be just big enough for 3 wires to go through and fit snugly) in the side of the box (facing away from you during use).



3. Take one wire from the resistor (the small part, usually brown, with the colored bands on it) and attach it to one of the terminals on the toggle switch; attach the other wire to the other terminal of the toggle switch. (Just wrap the wires around the terminal screws, but don't tighten them yet.)
4. Attach one wire from the capacitor (the large, usually yellow, part with the printing on one side) to one of the terminals on the toggle switch. (Again, just wrap them around, but don't tighten yet.)
5. Cut a piece of wire 4 inches long and strip $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of the insulation from each end.
6. Attach one end of the wire to either terminal of the toggle switch and tighten; thread the other end of the wire starting inside the box, and out through the central hole where the doorbell button will be mounted and attach it to one terminal of the doorbell button (but don't tighten yet).



17 CHARGED

Seventeen men were charged yesterday with illegal abstraction of electricity involving the telephone system after Scotland Yard detectives and Post Office investigation officers had taken equipment from premises at 17, The Road, Hammerhead, London. The men will appear at London Court tomorrow.

PHONES CHARGE MEN REMANDED

Seventeen men accused of illegally using electricity through the telephone system were allowed bail when they appeared at West London magistrates court yesterday.

The hearing was adjourned till Nov. 7. It follows a police raid on a flat in Hammersmith, on Saturday.

A £5 million remedy

The Investigation Branch—the Post Office's own 80-man detective force, housed in Euston Tower, London—promptly gave phreaking their top priority. Meanwhile Post Office engineers began laboriously to re-wire vulnerable parts of the main group exchange and the most obvious "phreaks' access to 'bar' the trunk network. But "barring" is a formidably costly task, anything up to £20,000 a time if the exchange is to be re-wired. According to one engineering source, the Post Office is currently "barring" all the phreaks' main access routes in a circle round London. This is said to be a £5 million job.

Can the phone phreaks phreak the Post Office?

cover story

Some months ago the Daily Telegraph magazine ended a long feature on American phone phreaks with this rhetorical question. Now the Sunday Times' revelation that the Investigation Branch of the Post Office is spending £5 million on anti-phreak measures - and the recent arrest of 17 people in West London, charged with illegally using electricity through the phone system - suggest that the authorities are getting worried. And last month's publication of an underground do-it-yourself guide to fixing phones - see facing page - shows that the Post Office really has got something to worry about.

Copies of this anonymously-produced 14-page pamphlet, a rough pastiche of the STD code book, have been circulating for several weeks. For the Post Office the most disturbing feature of 'People's Power Pamphlet 1' is that it shows how virtually anyone can fix a phone - without using any complicated or expensive equipment.

We look at the profits of the Post Office, the legal weaponry which the phone phreaks are up against, the Post Office's censorship of magazines - and at the suppression of the American magazine Ramparts which published the article on which 'People's Power Pamphlet 1' is based.

Profits

As is generally known the telecommunications section of the Post Office now makes a lot of money. A modest £12.6 million profit in 1961-2 rose during the decade to a peak of £93.5 million in 1970-1. And last year's figure was respectable enough at £58 million. However even the 1970-1 profit fell below the Post Office's target of 10 per cent return on capital.

It's often supposed that the profits of telecommunications are used to offset the losses of the postal services. This is an oversimplification. In fact letters have in the decade 1970-1 lost only £12.9 million while parcels lost £62.1 million. Also the new Giro managed to lose £13.7 million and money orders £17.2 million.

And of course - despite its losses in some sections - the Post Office still makes an overall profit, £20.5 million in 1970-1, £36.1 million in 1971-2.

It's also a relevant point that the Post Office Fund - set up in the early 1930s to absorb the Post Office's surplus, then suspended in 1940 - would have been worth £137 million by 1956, when a new fund was established. The profit made by the Post Office in this period went direct to the Treasury.

The demand that the Post Office should be profitable (even postal services are supposed to make 2 per cent of total expenditure) obviously prevent it providing an efficient service. This happens in two ways: first, services which lose money - postal deliveries in rural areas - tend to be cut back; secondly, wages are held down with a similar result.

In their evidence to the 1971 enquiry which followed the postal strike, the UPW stated: 'On the last occasion when Post Office wage rates fell substantially behind the going rate elsewhere it was necessary in some places to cancel some deliveries and collections...'

And on tariff increases the UPW pointed out: 'Tariff increases have always been designed to maintain a level of service lower than that which was being given when the last tariff increase was made. As a

result of this policy the level of service to the community has continually declined.'

Finally, where 'uneconomic' services were maintained, the UPW forcefully attacked the Post Office demand that postal workers should subsidise them by accepting low wages.

In her book Beyond Babel (Deutsch 1972) Brenda Maddox takes a critical look at the Post Office's record of investment in new equipment. In the early 1920s the GPO decided to introduce Strowger step-by-step switches throughout its exchanges - and to maintain steady supplies gave five big companies exclusive rights to supply telephone equipment. This 'ring' of five has since been reduced by take-overs to three: Plessey, GEC-AEI and Standard Telephone and Cables.

After the war the profit-conscious industry and the Post Office agreed to keep the Strowger system instead of developing crossbar - a mistake which 'is to blame, as much as anything can be, for the crossed lines, static and dead silences now encountered in the British telephone service.'

Further blunders followed though not all of them were caused by the industry's concern to maximise profits. Some were just blunders. The Highgate Wood all-electric exchange opened and closed on the same day in December 1962. Later the Post Office spent £25 million on six projected versions of an electronic exchange - and cancelled all but two.

The Post Office now guarantees the ring only 50 per cent of its orders - but in practice the figure is higher. The Post Office says it recognises the contribution which the firms in the group have made to electronic development and considers 'that they should be guaranteed continuity of production for a limited period to reap the benefit of their investment'.

What this has meant in practice is that by 1970 the average contract was eight months behind schedule; the newer the equipment the greater the delay. Or, put another way, it means that the existing waiting list for new telephones remains a constant figure - 100,000.

Generally the Post Office has shown little enthusiasm to extend use of the telephone among the working-class. 'It has never fought with local authorities to install

telephones in the millions of homes built with public money since the war. Only about 10 per cent of the people who are considered working-class are telephone subscribers,' says Barbara Maddox. After all, the poorer you are, the less you'll spend on telephone calls - and the less the Post Office will make as a result.

Laws

According to People's Power Pamphlet 1 the Mute Box has already been built and used successfully in Britain. The pamphlet repeats Ramparts' assurance that detection is unlikely if care is taken. However suspected British phone phreaks face a formidable battery of legal charges.

The 17 people arrested last month are accused of illegally using electricity under the 1968 Theft Act. 'A person who dishonestly uses without due authority, or dishonestly causes to be wasted or directed any electricity shall on conviction on indictment be liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years.' The corresponding provision under the Larceny Act 1916 was sometimes used against people dishonestly using a telephone.

By the 1968 Theft Act a new section was introduced into the Post Office Act. 'Fraudulent use of public telephone or telex system with intent to avoid payment (including any such system provided, under licence, otherwise than by the Postmaster General)' is the crime. And the punishment is 'on summary conviction imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months or to a fine not exceeding £100 or to both; or on conviction on indictment imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years'.

Then there's our old friend 'conspiracy'. If it is proved that there was an agreement between two or more people to use telephones with intent to avoid payment - a Mute Box takes two - this would be indictable. Conspiracy is a common law misdemeanour for which there is no maximum penalty.

But of course the crucial aspect of the law of 'conspiracy' is that it can be applied even where no specific statutes were broken.

The publishers of the pamphlet have not

broken any specific law. There are no regulations in Britain equivalent to the California penal code, making it illegal to sell 'plans or instructions' for any 'instruments, apparatus or device' intended to avoid telephone charges.

But the law of 'incitement', like 'conspiracy', is designed to catch anybody who hasn't committed a specific offence. At common law it is a crime which is indictable to solicit or incite another to commit a crime, whether it is a statutory or common law offence and whether it has any effect or not.

And, if Grass Roots can be accused of 'incitement to murder' for republishing an article (see INSIDE STORY 5), no political publisher can feel safe from the law of incitement.

But unlike Grass Roots and Ramparts the publishers of People's Power Pamphlet 1 have not identified themselves. Older readers will remember the 'Spies for Peace' who in 1963 successfully published an anonymous duplicated pamphlet on NATO exercises and 'Regional Seats of Government'. Within weeks the original had been republished many times by different groups, while the 'Spies for Peace' remained undetected. More recently various political pamphlets have appeared anonymously without - so far - a single prosecution.

Censorship

Under the Post Office Act it is illegal to send an 'obscene' article through the post. It is not a defence against this charge (as it is against prosecutions under the Obscene Publications Act) that the material is not likely to deprave and corrupt: the mere fact of 'obscenity' is enough.

What is obscenity? In his summing up of the notorious OZ trial Mr Justice Argyle put it this way: 'There are many art treasures which are on public show in this country which, taken in isolation, might be considered as obscene... Why weren't they prosecuted? The answer was that they were 'world famous'.

You have the paradoxical situation in which 'obscene' material can be on open display everywhere from art galleries to

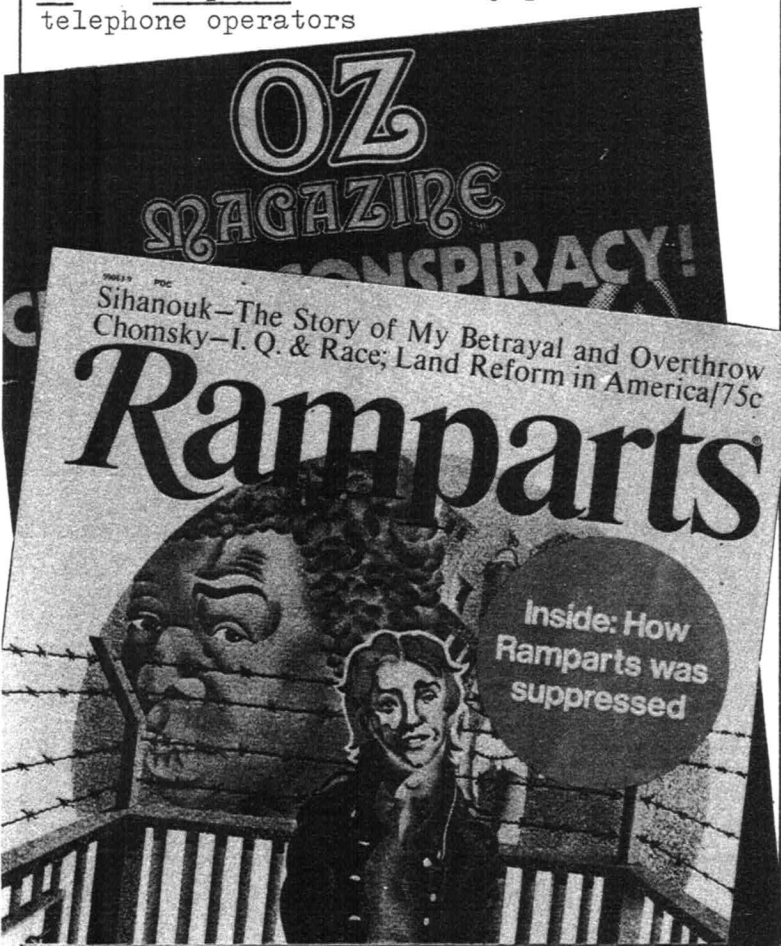
porn shops, available to children, offending old ladies and Lord Longford, but this same material when sent through the post in a plain envelope is liable to prosecution.

The final result of the OZ trial was that Felix Dennis, Jim Anderson and Richard Neville were cleared of breaking the Obscene Publications Act. But their conviction under the Post Office Act was upheld and they were given a suspended prison sentence.

Since then the Post Office has continued to harass OZ magazine. In February 1972 the subscription copies of OZ No 40 were seized and held by the Post Office. Two months later the same thing happened to OZ no 41.

As a later OZ reported 'Although no action at all was taken by any member of the public or police to seek the prosecution of issues 40 and 41 and although both these OZs enjoyed national (and international) circulation quite openly in newsagents and bookstands up and down the country, still the Post Office felt it necessary to impound subscribers' copies mailed in plain brown envelopes.'

OZ and Ramparts: censored by post and telephone operators



A member of the OZ staff explained 'Our subscription copies are sent out by a computer firm in Cricklewood. They stick on the labels and the copies - about 2,000 - are picked up by the Post Office in sacks.

'I spoke to a high-ranking member of the Post Office who said they looked at them to see if they were obscene. "How do you know?" I said. "How do you know when to open mail?" "The Post Office is empowered to search anything we suspect to be containing drugs" he said.'

Issues 40 and 41 were sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions, the OZ editors were cautioned, though not in the end charged. Finally, during October - eight months after the first copies were seized - both issues were delivered.

Suppression

It was closing time on Thursday, May 12. The people who work at the Golden Gate Magazine Company in San Francisco's Tenderloin were leaving for the day, when a well-dressed man walked in and quietly presented a sheaf of xerox copies and his calling card, on the back of which was pencilled 'Ramparts June Issue, phone freak box,' and then got back in his car and drove off.

The next morning, Mr Seely, Golden Gate's manager, received a call from yesterday's visitor. The caller identified himself as a Special Agent of Pacific Telephone and Telegraph, the Bell system's operating company in California. The conversation was brief: had Mr Seely received the copy of the California Penal Code sections? The caller had obligingly underlined section 502.7 and its phrases that it is illegal to sell 'plans or instructions' for any 'instrument, apparatus or device' intended to avoid telephone toll charges, and that the penalty for violation is up-to-a-year in jail. That was all.

If Mr Seely was aware that the Special Agent's employers were determined people with considerable influence and limitless resources for pursuing civil and criminal actions, it was not because of anything said in this conversation. There was no menace in the voice on the telephone, no demands or threats. But the iron fist was poorly concealed by the velvet glove. Mr

Seely understood very well that he was being offered 'protection'.

The Special Agent was, as Don Corlene says, making him a proposition he couldn't refuse. The June issue never went on sale in San Francisco.

It also didn't go on sale in other California cities where similar visits were made. A major wholesaler in New York was contacted, although the magazine did briefly appear there and in other Eastern cities. But within a week, American Telephone and Telegraph had achieved what the CIA, Pentagon, FBI and other targets of Ramparts' journalism over the last ten years hadn't been able to bring about: the nationwide suppression of this magazine. As this is being written, trucks are stopping at wholesalers and retailers all over the country to collect the thousands of copies that AT&T claims as the spoils of a swift and silent war.

The tactics of the Bell system were carefully chosen to place the editors of this magazine in an almost irresolvable dilemma. The harassment continued, AT&T threatening the magazine itself, noting at the time (and later on to an Associated Press reporter) that civil charges might be filed as well as a criminal complaint reaching as high as a felony conspiracy charge against the editors. It became clear that they intended to use the legions of agents and attorneys (the blue-ribbon San Francisco law firm representing all telephone systems - Pillsbury, Madison and Sutro - has 160 lawyers on its staff) to block the distribution of the magazine.

Telephone Company attorneys demanded that the copyright of the 'Phone Phreak' article be assigned to the Bell System so that they could prosecute underground or other publications that might reprint it; that the film and plates from which the article had been printed be delivered up; and that Ramparts agree never to print a similar article in the future. Knowing that subscriber copies of the magazine had already been mailed out, they requested a copy of our confidential subscriber list so that they could place those who had received our June issue under surveillance, and that we respond with a 'No Comment' when other members of the press called to ask why AT&T

had confiscated our magazines.

Demands that we entrap our own readers and allow ourselves to be muzzled were so outrageous that they easily could be rejected. And as for ourselves, we were willing to have the matter go to court, where it obviously belonged. But the Bell System had hostages we had to consider. Their attorneys indicated that the whole network handling Ramparts was also vulnerable to civil and criminal charges. This meant that the over 500 wholesalers and thousands of retailers distributing the magazine could also be prosecuted. It was clear from our conversations that the largest corporation in the world lacked neither the will nor the resources to do it. To protect this distribution network, the lifeblood of this and other publications, we agreed to the recall of our issue.

We received no immunity from prosecution. All we got from our negotiations with telephone company attorneys was an insight into the unbridled power and arrogance of this mammoth corporation and also an understanding of the process by which we had been betrayed. For AT&T by its own admission got advance notice of the contents of the June issue, not by any process of legal discovery, but directly from our printer, W A Krueger & Co, a national company with headquarters in Milwaukee. Krueger willingly took our check for \$12,000 and printed the issue, but protected itself by sending off an advance copy, not to a district attorney's office or to some other 'duly constituted authority,' but directly to AT&T.

The above article is reprinted from the July Ramparts. In October they reported a happier event for phone phreaks - their first international convention. Sponsored by the Youth International Party Line it was held in the basement ballroom of New York's Hotel Diplomat on 29 July. At one point 'Al Bell' passed out mimeographed sheets containing instructions on how to build a Black Box or mute. Next to the speaker's stand was a large cardboard-box model of the device which Bell pointed to as he explained the construction and operation of the device. 'It's simpler than the one described in the June Ramparts,' he said, 'but it uses the same principle.'