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Land of the Would-Be Free

A BILL to prohibit private American detective agencies from helping foreign governments or foreign political parties to snoop on their own people away from home has been introduced by Rep. Cornelius E. Gallagher (D., N.J.)

Mr. Gallagher was disturbed by Virginia Prewett's syndicated column in The Washington Daily News which reported that Haiti's dictator Francois Duvalier, with the help of American private eyes, "is spying on Haitians in New York and elsewhere, with brutal reprisals for those who criticize Duvalier overseas and then go home." (The Haitian Government denied this, but we know better).

Of course, any American citizen can be made the target of private surveillance, provided it doesn't interfere with his personal freedom, safety or right to privacy — altho this last is only sketchily defined. Still, as a U.S. citizen he has certain legal protections and guarantees.

On the other hand, a political exile,

whether because of his restricted employment rights, lack of funds or lack of citizenship, is all too frequently in an especially defenseless condition. The Dominican Republic's late unlamented Trujillo regime didn't even balk at killing some of its nationals in the United States.

The picture of political exiles in the Land of the Free being stalked by American gumshoes under foreign hire is, therefore, especially repellent. It smacks of foreign terror, licensed within our shores.

America, as Mr. Gallagher says, "should remain a haven for the persecuted." It's certainly an imperfect haven if persons escaping oppression discover dogging their footsteps private U. S. detectives in the pay of the very tyranny they fled.

If a guest in our country is considered a criminal in his native land, let his government try to extradite him thru regular court proceedings. If he hasn't committed an extraditable crime, he should be left alone as long as he obeys our laws.