

WE THINK the lady doth protest too much—the lady in this case, being a composite of those White House gentlemen who are taking such sudden, horrified offense at the ancient, if not always honorable, practice of leaking to the press. Three of the President's most faithful servants—Messrs. Ken Clawson, Patrick Buchanan and Gerald Warren—have raised quite a furor on this matter in recent days. A sample of their work, from Mr. Buchanan, appears on the opposite page today. In this letter, Mr. Buchanan expresses his outrage over 'malicious leaks out of House Judiciary, seemingly aimed at damaging and destroying in print the reputations of the President and his Secretary of State.' For purposes of identification, this is the same Patrick Buchanan who, in his capacity as a special presidential consultant, wrote a memorandum to John Ehrlichman in July of 1971 which also had to do with the subject of leaks and with destroying reputations. True, in this memorandum, Mr. Buchanan expressed his reservations about a project subsequently carried forward by the White House and expressly designed to gather and disseminate—which is to say, "leak"—damaging information about Daniel Ellsberg. But it is interesting to note why Mr. Buchanan frowned on the idea. He did not, for example, interpose any ethical or legal arguments against this use of the time and energies of members of the President's staff. Rather, he said, that opinion on this issue had been decided and was "not going to be turned around in the public mind by a few "well-placed leaks . . . This is not to argue that the effect is not worthwhile—but that simply we ought not now to start investing major personnel resources in the kind of covert operation not likely to yield any major political dividends to the President."

The President—Heavens to Betsy, we almost forgot. Forgot what, you ask? Why, all that dialogue in those transcripts of confidential conversations which the President himself made public and in which on more than one occasion he conducts something of a seminar on the utility of the calculated leak. Do you remember the anguished discussions of how some secret FBI information might be leaked to the detriment of the public reputations of some prominent Democrats? Do you remember the President's offer to his assembled leakers of what he called "IRS stuff" for purposes of dis-

crediting his political opposition? Do you remember that phase—whichever it was—in which the President was contemplating the convening of a grand jury to preempt the Senate Watergate Committee hearings and simultaneously to manufacture an excuse for his subordinates and campaign associates to decline to make further public comment on Watergate matters? Let us refresh your memory on that because it had an interesting angle: some of the statements made in confidence before the Grand Jury, it was apparently thought, might in fact look good for the White House if they were made public—so what was to be done about that? The exchange took place between Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Nixon:

H. . . . I was going to say that it might be to our interest to get it out.

P. Well, we could easily do that. Leak out certain stuff. We could pretty much control that.

The examples could be multiplied. The Watergate Committee has collected (and in some instances itself leaked) evidence suggesting that the calculated leak was something of a way of life in Mr. Nixon's White House. But the point is fairly simple and it comes in two general parts. The first is that this business of leaking to the press is, as we have noted, an ancient custom; that no one and no political party has a monopoly on it; that it often unfairly wrongs innocent people; and that in this last respect it raises some serious questions well worth serious discussion. The second is that Mr. Buchanan's discussion of it is not serious. His own record and that of the White House he serves, demonstrate that his shock is pretty stagey and that the current campaign of which he is an eager foot soldier has all the characteristics of just one more effort to divert public attention from the real Watergate issues.

This is most emphatically not to deny that the calculated leak has become a problem for the House Judiciary Committee—or that it has also become, to some extent, a problem for the press. At the heart of the problem is a collection of pressures as contradictory as they are intense, that are bearing in upon the work of the Judiciary Committee. We think some of these can be relieved and we will be returning to these genuinely serious aspects of the matter in a subsequent editorial.