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Only Kissinger's lies made exposure of papers important

WASHINGTON — The government could easily have avoided the grief caused by publication of the secret White House papers on India and Pakistan merely by doing one thing—telling the truth.

If presidential adviser Henry Kissinger

Jack Anderson

had not lied to the press in his December 7 background briefing on the Asia war, there would have been no story for us to write. The documents would simply have confirmed what the public had already been told.

Instead the White House chose to flagrantly mislead the public. Kissinger said the administration was not anti-India, a misrepresentation that must have been obvious to both India, Pakistan and the allies of both.

The secret papers prove that the administration was militantly anti-India. It was this contradiction, not the fact that the papers were classified, that made them news.

Indeed, it is doubtful that the various sources who made the papers available would have done so if the administration had not engaged in such bald-faced deception.

Now, unfortunately, the administration seems bent on widening its credibility gap. It is thundering off in search of our sources instead of making good the solemn promise it made during the court battle over the Pentagon papers.

Reform promised

At that time, the government admitted there was "massive over-classification" of official documents. It promised to reform the classification system, which it had undermined by chronic over-use of the "secret" stamp.

Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart summarized the state of affairs in one sentence: "When everything is classified," he wrote, "nothing is classified."

Today, documents which might genuinely need to be kept temporarily from public view are lost in a classified shuffle of miscellaneous cables, correspondence, intelligence summaries and other bric-a-brac.

Government officials almost daily demonstrate their contempt for the security labels by slipping newsmen selected secret papers which make them look good.

If these labels had any real meaning, the government itself would be the nation's No. 1 security risk.

But while high officials have debased and cheapened the "secret" stamps, they still find them useful for one purpose: to keep their actions—and particularly their blunders—hidden from public view.

But this passion for secrecy is far more serious than mere bureaucratic bungling. Secrecy, as the Supreme Court has observed, is not merely undemocratic, it is anti-democratic.

The proper function of our political system depends on the ability of the public to be informed. This is the crucial mission of the First Amendment—to promote a maximum flow of news and commentary to every citizen.

There is no way this fundamental con-

cept, so basic to democracy, can be squared with a system of "security" classification which is, in reality, a legalized form of censorship.

The White House papers on India and Pakistan contain not a shred of information that threatens the nation's security. Instead, they reveal the inside policy maneuverings and public deceptions of our top officials.

They tell the story of foreign policy moves that may have pushed India—the world's second largest nation and its largest democracy—into the arms of the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, we find ourselves locked in an embrace with a feeble, beaten military dictatorship.

Putting the secret stamp on such information has nothing to do with national security. Rather, it has to do with political security.

We exposed in a series of columns last June how Federal Power chairman John Nassikas lied to Congress, sold out the public in a \$4 billion rate case and suppressed his own economist's opposition to the giveaway.

Our charges were investigated by Rep. Neal Smith, D-Iowa, who summoned Nassikas and others to testify before his House Special Small Business subcommittee. Now Smith has completed his formal report. In many respects, it is tougher than our columns.

"It is the view of the subcommittee," declares the report, "that the public has lost confidence in the ability of the FPC to set just and reasonable producer rates for the sale of natural gas in interstate commerce."

"The subcommittee believes that the action taken by the FPC in creating higher rates for gas produced in the southern Louisiana area was not in the public's interest."

We had estimated this rate increase would cost America's consumers \$4 billion. Smith's subcommittee estimated the sell-out closer to \$4.5 billion.

Confidence undermined

"The commission's use of reserve figures furnished by the natural gas industry," contends the subcommittee, "serves only to derogate the public's confidence in the regulatory process and in those who are sworn to protect the public interest."

For page after page, the subcommittee whiplashed the FPC and gas industry. At one point it suggested that another government agency, the Federal Trade Commission, should step into the case and determine whether the American Gas Association has practiced "collusion or other anti-trust activities."

The report was signed by the subcommittee members of both parties which took special courage for the Republicans—Silvio Conte, Mass., Joseph McDade, Pa., and James Broyhill, N.C.—since the membership of the American Gas Association reads like a Who's Who of GOP fat cat contributors.

The record is now clear that Nassikas is serving not the taxpayers who pay his salary but the gas tycoons who contribute to Republican coffers. We think he should resign from the FPC and take a position with the American Gas Association.