

Why So Many 'Leaks'?

By JAMES RESTON

WASHINGTON, Jan. 13—The Nixon Administration is now trying to fathom a mystery. Why, it wants to know, are so many more Government secrets now leaking to the press? Who is responsible for these breaches of security, and what is to be done about them? The F.B.I. and the military intelligence services are now scrambling desperately for the answer.

There are many theories. The political theory is that the Federal civil servants, most of them appointed during the long executive domination of the Democratic party, are trying to embarrass the present Republican Administration.

The philosophical theory is that the anti-war bureaucrats are handing over to the press any documents that might show the difference between what the President and his closest associates are saying in public and what they are saying in private. And if you study the disclosures of the Pentagon papers and the Anderson papers, there is obviously something to these political and philosophical theories.

Nevertheless, the guess here is that the real explanation is not primarily political or philosophical but scientific and technical. The real source of the leaks is Chester Carlson, who invented the electrostatic copying or Xerox system, which now dominates the Federal Government and influences the flow of information in every other big institution in the country.

Every Government department, agency, bureau, section, sub-section, secretary's office, assistant secretary's office and secretary to the assistant secretary has a copying machine, or access to one, and copying, filing, and circulating has become a rule in Washington and even a disease.

Washington is really run by intelligent women secretaries, who are constantly being asked by forgetful Cabinet members, "What about this and that?" So they keep the records, and Xerox whatever they might forget.

The Xerox system is so simple that nobody in this town can do without it. Henry Kissinger has a meeting of the principal advisers to the President in the Cabinet room of the White House to discuss what to do about the Indo-Pakistani crisis, and naturally, he wants a record of what is said, which is recorded by the official rapporteur, and then Xeroxed for the participants and circulated.

Switch now to the Xerox or copying room in the basement of the White House. The operator, unless he is policed, can punch ten, or eleven, or fifteen copies of the secret record, and circulate them as he likes. The possibilities of leaks are obvious.

Every copy going to any authorized person in the Kissinger meeting on the Indo-Pakistani war can easily and quickly be Xeroxed and circulated to the "responsible persons" in his own department, passing through aides and secretaries, who have other Xerox machines, and while most of them merely pass the message along to its intended receiver, anybody along the

WASHINGTON

line can intercept and duplicate the message and circulate it at will, or so it seems.

This complicates J. Edgar Hoover's problem of plugging the leaks. Finding the source of the Pentagon papers was easy, but getting to the leak of the Anderson papers, with all those copying machines around, is a puzzle.

Why Anderson? He has never been known to be close to any high officials in the State or Defense Departments, but what of the technicians on the Xerox machines? With all this easy copying technique around, even the F.B.I. doesn't know where to turn.

It would be hard to prove that the recent security leaks are the result of anti-Nixon, anti-war sentiments within the civil service or the Foreign Service of the United States. The tradition in both serves the President, no matter what he does; but once secrets are copied and circulated widely by Xerox, the elements of accident and disclosure are obviously far greater than ever in the past.

Quick, modern, electrostatic copying has had a much greater influence on security and diplomacy than is generally realized. The theory was that, if you could copy documents quickly, you could expand knowledge, information, and truth; and while there is a lot to be said for this, it has worked out in surprising ways.

For example, ambassadors or Foreign Service officers of the United States abroad, who used to be able to send their dissents privately to the State Department or the President, now have to calculate that their dissents will be copied and circulated, so they tend to be cautious.

Always, now, they have that Xerox machine in mind. Will they really be able to speak their minds privately, or will their views be circulated all over Washington and hurt their careers? For the men in the Foreign Service, who feel that the State Department has lost its influence and authority in the last few years, this is a serious question.

No doubt some of them still keep writing what they believe, even if they think the White House will not like their dissents, but a lot of them, maybe most of them, hold back for fear of how their judgments will look after they are copied and circulated.

So maybe the mystery is not political or philosophical but merely technical. Paradoxically, the copying machines which were intended to expand information and truth are going in the opposite direction. The Xerox is not increasing security but diminishing it. It is not encouraging honest dissent, but blocking it.

Beyond this, it is overwhelming officials here in paper work and keeping them from the definition and resolution of their main problem. The modern copying machines are not informing Washington so much as they are enslaving and confusing it, and keeping it from solving its security problems and getting at the doubts of its loyal dissenters.