

How Many Secrecies?

By EDWARD TELLER

LIVERMORE, Calif.—Here are three examples: the secrecy of the Kremlin, the secrecy of Washington, and the secrecy of The New York Times.

Of the Kremlin secrecy it has been said that it consists of five parts: the military secrets, the administrative secrets, the economic secrets, the scientific secrets and everything else in Russia (which is also secret).

Russian secrecy has old historic roots. It is not a creation of Communism. It is as old as the Russian police state and as Russian Siberia. This working secrecy has a high price in rubles and in human freedom.

Washington secrecy is different. It does not work well. It is probable that the Russian leaders know our secrets. But at home the secrecy of Washington increases the unavoidable confusion of our 200-million-headed democracy.

American secrecy has a short, inconsistent and sorry history of no more than three decades. Those officials who have the impossible job to enforce secrecy in an open society

labor with diligence and with discretion. But square pegs won't fit into round holes.

The New York Times secrecy is only a few months old. For weeks newspapermen had their own mini-security. Forty volumes of secrets cannot be published by any paper. In tightly guarded sessions it was decided what should appear on the pages of The New York Times. Assuming that the news was fit to print, was the selection made to fit the bias of the editors?

In the process secrets were turned into sensations. Details of agonizing decisions became food for emotion. What should have enjoyed a measure of decent discretion appeared in the glare of secrets exploded.

I used to think that secrecy is incompatible with freedom of the press. But now it seems that our press thrives on secrecy. This "successful" use of secrets has also a high price. We pay for it in a loss of respect for our laws.

The real question is: could we do with fewer secrets? The war in Viet-

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nam is the first modern armed conflict which was fought without censorship. This could be a real landmark in establishing freedom of the press. Is the press mature enough for this measure of freedom?

In the last couple of years Washington has tried a more open policy. We were told more about Russian rockets and American mistakes. Should we not go farther along that road? Why should we play with secrecy? Why should we not let American scientists know the facts of which Russian scientists are well aware? Why should we not publish papers before they are stolen? Why can we not keep confidences in a quiet manner and open up the results of technology, and the decisions on policy to public view and public criticism?

Efficient government can, of course, not function while the (big?) brother

of the television camera is constantly watching. Publication of the planned route of our nuclear submarines would make these vessels useless. Codes for communications with our embassies must be kept secret.

But can we and should we keep any secret for more than a year? Need we put down in form of secret documents every advice and every discussion?

If Washington secrecy is put on a strict reducing diet, the secrecy of The New York Times collapses. Let us leave the serious business of long-term secrecy to the Russians. Even they may get tired of it—some day.

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