

White House Staff Is Ordered To Report All Media Contacts

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 21—The White House acknowledged today that all members of the White House staff had been told to report all contacts with the news media to the press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler.

Gerald L. Warren, the press spokesman, said in response to questions that an "agreement" to report all media contacts to the press office had been reached by senior staff members of the White House within the last 10 days.

Mr. Warren said that the new policy did not come in the form of a directive from President Nixon. He said it was not the purpose of the policy to "intimidate" White House staff members from talking to the press. Nor was this to be construed as a form of "censorship," he said.

The policy was adopted because the senior staff members thought it "would be helpful" for the press office to be kept abreast of the current "concerns" of the press, Mr. Warren declared.

However, members of the White House press corps indicated by their questions today that they feared the new disclosure policy would have an inhibiting effect on their news sources.

'Chilling Effect' Feared

One correspondent asked if the reporting requirement would not have a "chilling effect" on staff officials sought out by the press. Mr. Warren replied that he did not think so.

No indication was given as to why the policy had been adopted at this time. Mr. Warren denied that the agreement was related to the recent series of leaks about military spying on the National Security Council.

Reporters at the White House said they could think of no precedent for a formal policy requiring the disclosure of all contacts between the staff and the news media.

However, Bill Moyers, who was press secretary under President Johnson, said in a telephone interview that while he was at the White House the staff was asked to keep the press office informed about what it was being asked and what it was answering.

But it was a completely informal and haphazard arrangement, Mr. Moyers added. President Johnson told the staff members to talk to whomever they wanted, he said.

Mr. Moyers said he believed that the requirement that White House staff members re-

port press contacts was unenforceable, "particularly in this Administration where they have no moral obligation to one another."

The disclosure policy applies to all staff members, including—*theoretically at least*—such high officials as Secretary of State Kissinger, who runs the National Security Council at the White House as well as the State Department; Gen. Alexander M. Haig, the President's chief of state; and Roy L. Ash, the director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Mr. Warren said that the new policy had been transmitted orally to White House staff members and added that there was nothing "structured" about disclosure requirements. He did not say whether the staff was to report its contacts with the press before or after such meetings.

The press spokesman sought to minimize the importance of the new policy. "This is not a big deal," he said to White House reporters besieging him with questions about the disclosure agreement.

Mr. Ziegler, to whom the reports of press contacts will go, has become one of President Nixon's closest advisers and confidants, while continuing to hold the position of press secretary.