Let's Have Some Conservative Leaks

New York

ONE OF THE characteristic phenomena of our era is the leaker — the anonymous individual, usually in the lower or middle echelons of government, who passes confidential documents or information to newsmen in an attempt to damage some public figure.

Thus some faceless bureaucrat leaked to the press information concerning President Nixon's tax returns — information which, to be sure, resulted in a full-scale review and new (though disputed) payments, but which the law had solemnly pledged to keep secret.

William Rusher

Over at the State Department just the other day, somebody's light fingers picked up a copy of a confidential cable from our Ambassador to South Vietnam, Graham Martin, and mailed it to Senator Kennedy. Ambassador Martin had warned his superiors, in the cable, against trusting Kennedy with accurate information on some subject; days later Kennedy was able, thanks to the leaker, to publish the cable and denounce Martin.

Similarly, columnist Jack Anderson somehow obtained and published, a couple of years ago, the actual minutes of a meeting of a committee of the National Security Council at which Henry Kissinger outlined the Nixon Administration's secret policy on India. And of course the investigation of the whole vast Watergate affair, as well as of Spiro Agnew and much else besides, has been accompanied by a torrent of leaks from "sources close to the prosecution," "persons familiar with the case," and so on.

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MY PURPOSE here is not to deplore this whole practice — though there is a case to be made that it is, in fact, deplorable. Let us concede, however, that it also has its uses.

Exactly how America benefitted by the expose of our government's real attitude toward India is less clear to me, but at least no great harm seems to have come of it. As for Watergate, the massive leaks were matched by — and partly in response to — an equally massive cover-up.

What interests me at the moment, though, is why the leaks are all one way. How come we never get the juicy details of (for example) Senator Kennedy's tax returns? Why aren't the leaks from Nixon's State Department matched by a few anonymous tidbits from the huge staffs maintained by the powerful Democratic moguls on Capitol Hill?

Wouldn't it be fun to read the minutes of a discussion around the editorial conference table at (say) the Washington Post or the New York Times? And surely there must be some "source close to the case" who can tell us whether the appropriate authorities are getting interested in the $50,060 Robert Maheu says he paid Hubert Humphrey in 1968 on the instructions of Howard Hughes — and if not, why not.

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OF COURSE, it may be that the leaks are all one way because liberal Democrats are all just naturally as pure as the driven snow. Maybe none of them ever claimed a dubious tax deduction, suppressed a fact, dissembled a policy or concealed a political contribution. But, as the Duke of Wellington remarked in another connection, if you believe that you'll believe anything.

The truth, I suspect, is that the leak is preeminently the weapon of the outsider against the insider. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, when there were still numerous security risks scattered through the federal bureaucracy, congressional investigators of that subject got a good many useful leads from "patriotic" tipsters in the executive branch (a fact that was loudly deplored, incidentally, by all good liberals).

Now the players have changed sides, and anonymous liberal bureaucrats are stealing the Nixon Administration blind. Practice, moreover, has improved the technique of the sport: The leaker today is generally safer in his anonymity, and deadlier in his effect, than was dreamed possible a quarter of a century ago.

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PATIENCE, MY CHILDREN; our time will come again. Even today a friendly hand may be hovering over some document no good liberal would like to see published.

And if and when they reclaim the White House, I promise you some revelations that will blow your mind.

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