

Secrecy Returning To White House



Jack Anderson

LESS THAN three months after President Ford promised he would run an open White House, he vetoed a Freedom of Information bill, which would have given the public more access to government documents.

The veto was accompanied by a move inside the White House to tighten security clearances. A memo, intended for the eyes only of staff chief Donald Rumsfeld, called for establishing procedures "to ensure that only cleared personnel deal with national security materials."

The memo proposed "a system," which would "continually verify" the tight security. It was necessary, stressed the memo, "to be certain that no one who has access to national security matters is not properly cleared."

★ ★ ★

BOTH THE VETO and the security crackdown are intended to protect diplomatic and military secrets, a White House spokesman explained.

Of course, we don't wish to jeopardize the nation's security. But in the past, our leaders have used security regulations to censor the news and protect themselves. They have swept their blunders and embarrassments, their inefficiency and corruption under the secrecy stamp.

There are surprisingly few documents that must be kept secret in the interest of national security. The number doesn't even begin to approach the 20 million doc-

uments and papers that the government hides from the people.

President Ford, who started his presidency with such openness, has been listening lately to Henry Kissinger. The Secretary of State gets highly excitable over news leaks, which he fears could hamper his personal diplomacy.

★ ★ ★

HIS HOWLS about leaks helped to stimulate the wiretaps and other excesses of the Nixon Administration. Now he is again in an uproar over leaks. He is particularly upset over our stories, quoting from secret documents on the Cyprus crisis and African policy.

On October 7, he slashed cable distribution to the various bureaus. The European Affairs Bureau, for example, was cut from 30 to six copies of incoming cables. This was accomplished by a strict warning not to circumvent the limitation by Xeroxing secret cables.

Top aides have also been making the rounds to discuss the leaks and to impress on the underlings how much Kissinger detests them.

"It's the old Nixon paranoia," one State Department official told us. "The Secretary believes we're all out to get him. He runs foreign affairs like a mid-19th Century German diplomat."

Footnote: It should be added, of course, that Kissinger's diplomatic style continues to produce amazing results.