

EDITORIAL

Leaks . . . Venomous or Vigilant?

When the President expresses anger because information he wishes to keep from the American people appears in newspapers or is broadcast on radio and television, he directs his ire at the press. The press, after all, are only doing their job—news gathering and dissemination.

Is not the President's annoyance misplaced? Should not those who employ leaks to achieve their strategic ends be the objects of the President's wrath? And were the man who occupies the Oval Office to analyze the purpose of those leaks he finds so onerous, he would discover they occur when one of his associates is unable to reach his ear through normal channels or, if such a one does, those opinions are ignored.

Everyone can appreciate that the President is a busy person. Were he to follow an Open Door policy or be influenced by every whim of his compatriots, assuredly there

would be no "course to stay" . . . no course at all. Leadership would fluctuate like a windvane. As the nation's leader, the President must set goals and attempt to achieve them.

What if the goals are unattainable except at costs the people of the country are unwilling to pay? The prudent leader must then adjust the goals. Presidents may be compared to generals leading soldiers to battle; in a clearly unwinnable war, a good general admits defeat before the last man falls to his death.

A general, too, depends on word from patrols, on supplies from the rear, on support from the flanks. The President cannot afford to forge ahead without backing of advocates and advice of staff. He needs their input. If the only way they can get his attention is by leaking information to the press, that action is justified. Only the informed leader fashions a suc-

cessful plan to attain desirable ends.

None of this is the responsibility of news reporters. Newsmen report what they learn from sources they consider trustworthy and, of course, if they believe the information is of material interest to the public.

Our historic past confirms that no President is immune from press coverage whether or not publication pleases him. His approval is not the criteria news gatherers apply. Nor should it be.

We, the people, have legal rights to know and moral needs to know what transpires behind closed doors. And, as well, what does not transpire. In both instances, our freedoms, health, safety, and survival are at stake.

Only an informed electorate can assess intelligently its government.