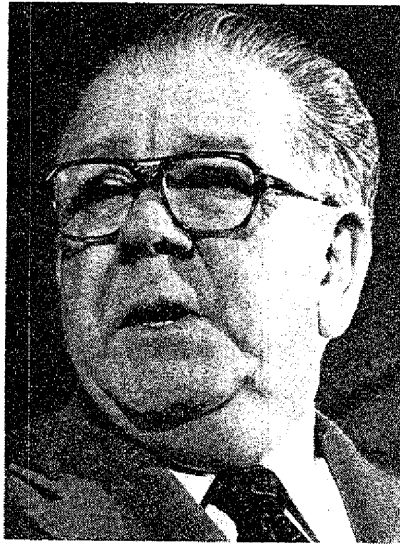
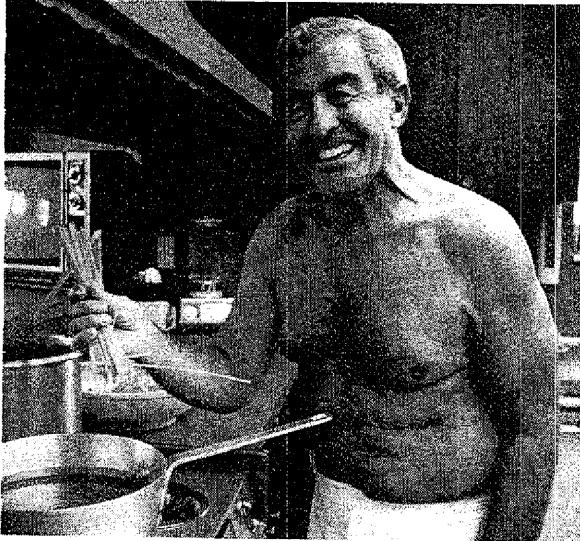


LYNN PELHAM



PROVENZANO RELAXING IN HIS KITCHEN; TEAMSTER BOSS FITZSIMMONS

INVESTIGATIONS

Teamsters' Watergate Connection

"What I mean is you could get a million dollars . . . And you could get it in cash. I know where it could be gotten . . . We could get the money. There is no problem in that."

So said Richard Nixon on March 21, 1973, while talking with White House Counsel John Dean about the Watergate burglars' demands for huge sums of hush money. When the transcript of the tape-recorded conversation was disclosed a year later, no one outside the cover-up conspiracy knew precisely what the President had in mind. It remained one of the many mysteries never cleared up by the Watergate investigation.

Now, TIME has learned, the Department of Justice believes Nixon may have been talking about a secret cash fund that had been raised for him by racketeers connected with the Team-

sters Union. The purpose behind the largesse had nothing to do with Watergate. Instead, according to a secret FBI report, the \$1 million was intended as a payoff for the Administration's cooperation in preventing Jimmy Hoffa from wresting the union presidency from Frank Fitzsimmons, a staunch Nixon supporter. Nixon had commuted Hoffa's 13-year prison sentence for jury tampering and mail fraud in December 1971, with the proviso that he have nothing to do with running the union until March 1980, when his sentence would have expired. But Hoffa persisted in trying to regain his old power in the union. On July 30, 1975, he vanished from outside Detroit and was presumably executed by the underworld.

The Justice Department has assigned more than 100 FBI agents to the Teamster probe—the most intensive investigation of the union since Robert

Kennedy put Hoffa behind bars in 1967. Thus far, investigators have implicated two union chiefs in the payoff—Fitzsimmons and Anthony (Tony) Provenzano. Teamster boss in New Jersey until he was convicted for labor racketeering in 1963. After Provenzano was released from prison in 1970, he too was barred from union activities, but for five years, and he nonetheless continued to wield great power among Teamsters. He is regarded by the FBI as a prime suspect in Hoffa's disappearance.

According to Government informers, Provenzano and his muscleman, Salvatore Briguglio, ordered in early January 1973 that \$500,000 in cash be delivered to a White House courier in Las Vegas. Provenzano allegedly told an associate he had collected the money at Fitzsimmons' request and that another \$500,000 had been provided for Nixon—also on Fitzsimmons' orders—by Allen Dorfman, a convicted Chicago labor racketeer and adviser to the Teamsters Union pension fund. Provenzano was quoted further as saying the cash had been requested by White House Aide Charles Colson, who handled the Administration's relations with the Teamsters.

Crucial Timing. The FBI believes that Colson, after getting President Nixon's approval on the evening of Jan. 3, 1973, either himself or through an associate, received the money in Las Vegas on Jan. 6, 1973. The timing is crucial. In late 1972, Watergate Burglar Howard Hunt was a loose cannon in the cover-up scheme, demanding through his lawyer, William Bittman, to be paid for his continued silence. The lawyer met with Colson on Jan. 3. Colson later told Dean: "Bittman came at me like a train."

The FBI investigation has found hotel records proving that a Provenzano courier was in Las Vegas on Jan. 6. Colson's White House calendar, obtained by Watergate investigators in 1974, is blank for the weekend of the 6th and 7th. But it shows that Colson spoke with Fitzsimmons on Monday, Jan. 8. Interviewed by FBI agents last February, Colson denied any knowledge of the Teamster money.

Justice Department officials now plan to question three other former Nixon associates, John Ehrlichman, H.R. ("Bob") Haldeman and John Mitchell, who are in prison for their roles in the Watergate cover-up. The investigators also are considering interrogating Nixon, who is immune from any punishment for federal crimes committed during his years in office because of the pardon received from Gerald Ford. One of the chief questions is what happened to the money. By an informant's account, the cash was never used by Nixon aides, apparently because they decided that the coverup was coming apart and paying hush money was futile. But investigators have not yet been able to track the money beyond Las Vegas.