

Of the C.I.A. and Goldwater's Campaign

To the Editor: NYR 1/16/75

Reporter Seymour Hersh is on to a good thing, and I wish him well. But perhaps he will forgive me if I remove some of the gloss from his Page One news story of Dec. 31. Here he recounts Senate testimony given by E. Howard Hunt to demonstrate that the C.I.A.'s history of domestic chicanery goes back a long way.

Hunt, it seems, told the Senators that, during the summer of 1964, his boss, C. Tracy Barnes, was instructed by President Johnson to acquire "any and all information" on Senator Barry Goldwater's Presidential campaign. That information, again according to Hunt, was to be passed to me. Since the implications of all this are fairly sordid, and since Mr. Barnes and President Johnson are both dead, I owe it to them as well as to myself to tell what I know.

I was concerned with Asia, particularly Vietnam, during the summer of 1964 (and for all-too many years to follow). I can recall several occasions during the Presidential campaign when, among the scores of pieces of mail that crossed my desk each day, there were press releases from the Republican National Committee providing advance texts on Goldwater's speeches.

Since there was a running debate between President Johnson and candidate Goldwater on what the United States should do in Vietnam, I paid mild attention to Goldwater's Vietnam ("Why not Victory?") views. The White House press office was flooded with such handouts, and it did not cross my mind that the C.I.A., at the direction of the President of the United States, may have mounted a major operation to assure that mimeographed

copies of Senator Goldwater's campaign oratory would be available shortly before or after it appeared in the early editions of the afternoon newspapers.

To tie up any further loose ends: I never heard of Mr. Hunt until he was caught with his bugs down at the Watergate; I was never told by Mr. Johnson or anyone else of the C.I.A. "assignment," and I never saw or heard of anything more lascivious in connection with Senator Goldwater's Presidential campaign than an occasional press release.

So much for the juicy fruits of the hot operation Mr. Hunt implies he conducted and Mr. Hersh apparently believes was mounted against Senator Goldwater in 1964.

Neither Mr. Hunt's story nor my account above is new, of course. Hunt's story was in The Washington Post (page 1) on Dec. 18, 1973; what I have repeated above was in The Post (page 1) on the following day. Perhaps Mr. Hersh felt Hunt's story was worth rehashing more than a year later. But if so, he should have also contacted me, or even better, done his homework. CHESTER L. COOPER

Washington, Jan. 2, 1975

The writer served in the White House from 1963 to 1966.