

# Harassed, Democratic Leaders Say

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WASHINGTON, March 7—A group of Democratic Governors contended today that they and their close associates were being systematically "harassed" by Federal police agencies and the Republican party.

Gov. Wendell Ford of Kentucky, reporting on a breakfast meeting with nearly 30 of his colleagues, said it was his "assumption" that the Nixon Administration was trying to tar the Democrats with the same brush of corruption that has stained the White House since the Watergate break-in.

A number of the investigations cited by the Democrats today at the National Governors' Conference have been well known for months, such as the tax investigation of Gov. David Hall of Oklahoma and of Gerald Wallace, brother of Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama.

The surprise was the diversity of other complaints and the Governors' willingness to risk suspicion of cover-ups in their charge of political prosecution.

Gov. Edwin W. Edwards of Louisiana reportedly told the closed meeting of Democratic Governors that agents of the Internal Revenue Service re-

cently appeared in his office, without notice, to question him and that the supposedly secret interview was "leaked" by the agency to a Louisiana newspaper the same day.

Gov. John J. Gilligan of Ohio said that, when the Justice Department investigated an alleged influence peddler in Ohio last year, Federal agents declined to confide in any state officials but apparently shared their early suspicions and leads with newspaper reporters, whose articles embarrassed the Gilligan administration.

## G.A.O. Role Cited

No evidence of wrongdoing was presented against any state official in the case, according to Governor Gilligan. "I resented the way we were treated," he said.

Gov. Wendell R. Anderson of Minnesota said that in his state, in Ohio and in Rhode Island, Republican officials had prodded the General Accounting Office, a Congressional agency that monitors Federal spending, to make essentially frivolous investigations of campaign financing records. "Is this a national plan to use the G.A.O. to intimidate Democrats in office?" he asked.

Governor Ford said that the G.A.O., the I.R.S. and the Justice Department were currently conducting investigations of

Democrats in Kentucky. I.R.S. agents, he said, are telling people in Kentucky that "they're auditing Democrats and they'll get to Republicans later." Governor Ford said: "They ought to paint with a broad brush. They ought to go after all of them."

An official of the tax agency denied the accusation. "I.R.S. does not engage in harassment for political or any other purposes," he said. The official added that, when Governor Hall first complained last year that the Government was picking on him for political reasons, the tax agency reported that at least three of the seven Governors then under audit were Republicans.

Several Democratic Governors emphasized today that they had no complaints. Gov. Daniel Walker of Illinois, Gov. Dale Bumpers of Arkansas and Gov. Dolph Briscoe of Texas said they were not aware of any Federal investigations of their offices.

Gov. Brendan T. Byrne, recently inaugurated in New Jersey, said, "I haven't been around long enough to get harassed." Gov. Milton J. Shapp of Pennsylvania said his tax returns had been audited every year for 12 or 15 years, but he suggested that he considered this to be a normal treatment for persons as wealthy as he.