

The Republican Department of Dirty Tricks

Rancid is a word we rarely use except when dealing with environmental issues and the need to find better ways to dispose of waste in our society. But, rancid is just about the only word to apply to what we know about the Watergate crimes, the circumstances surrounding them and the allegations concerning them which have not been laid to rest. The incredible, but internally consistent and persuasive interview which Alfred Baldwin III gave to the Los Angeles Times and which was reprinted in this newspaper on Friday—even if it doesn't give all the facts about the higher-ups in this affair—gives you all you want to know and more about its character.

It tells you, in short, that the Nixon campaign committee was running, under innocuous cover and with "laundered" campaign money, a clandestine intelligence operation worthy of the Central Intelligence Agency. In the jargon of professional intelligence agents, this is what is sometimes known as a Department of Dirty Tricks. And Mr. Baldwin's account also tells us that the dirty tricks were not simply directed at Democratic Party headquarters, but that even from underling Baldwin's limited vantage point, they were directed at a variety of Democratic political targets such as activities at Sen. McGovern's pre-convention headquarters and at the Democratic Convention itself.

Moreover, Baldwin's story—even if it doesn't exactly connect John L. Mitchell as the directing force behind the dirty tricks department—shows at best a certain lack of bureaucratic distinction between the Mitchells' personal needs, the use of government property and outright criminal activity. Mr. Baldwin tells us that he was hired by James McCord, security chief for the Nixon campaign committee, to provide security for Mrs. Mitchell after Mr. Mitchell had left the government. Before one of his trips with her, he was given eight crisp new \$100 bills to pay for "food, drinks, tips and incidental expenses." And, when he got to New York, even though Mrs. Mitchell was no longer the wife of a government official, they were chauffeured around in J. Edgar Hoover's bullet-proof limousine—which presumably still belonged to the U.S. Government.

Then, Baldwin, after being personally thanked by Mr. Mitchell for the fine job he had done in taking care of Mrs. Mitchell, was shifted by McCord to the job of monitoring illegally installed wiretaps at the Democrats' headquarters. And, on the way to do that job, he was given five more crisp new \$100 bills presumably to pay for the incidental expenses of his newly assigned chores for the committee to re-elect Richard Nixon President of the United States.

New hundred dollar bills weren't the only tools he was given to ply his trade. He was issued a ".38 snub-nosed police special." When he protested that he had no permit to carry a weapon, he says he was told by McCord, "You're working for the former

attorney general and there's no way a policeman or any other law enforcement officer is going to question your right to carry that weapon. But, if you have any problem, have them call me." Later, he says he was told that the pistol had belonged to Fred La Rue, a former Nixon White House aide, whom McCord described as being "over from the White House" and "John Mitchell's right-hand man." That kind of White House name-dropping seems to

have been fairly commonplace and to have impressed and reassured Mr. Baldwin.

The rest is like the plot of a very bad spy novel. People were using code names. A former White House official was carrying around a pistol wrapped in a towel inside an attache case. There was an abortive attempt to break into McGovern's headquarters to monitor phone calls. There was bugging equipment said to be worth \$15,000. Cars rendezvoused in the night with the help of a lot of walkie-talkie conversation. Mr. Baldwin listened to about 200 illegally tapped phone calls from the Democrats' headquarters in three weeks. There was his entry into Democratic committee headquarters under an assumed name in order to find chairman O'Brien's office and to diagram it. And finally, there was Mr. Baldwin acting as lookout from a Howard Johnson's across the street on the night of the burglary, June 17.

Mr. Baldwin never questioned any of McCord's orders, because, in his words, "I felt he was acting under orders and with full authority. After all, his boss was John Mitchell, the committee director and former Attorney General of the United States."

That pretty well wraps up Mr. Baldwin's story. Of course, there are other hanging accusations, many of which we have posed in these columns. One of the latest, however, is that some of the information obtained from the illegal wiretaps was delivered to the White House itself—to Mr. William Timmons, assistant to the President for congressional relations—and also to people high in the Nixon campaign committee. Another new revelation is that a contribution of \$100,000 to the Nixon campaign was clearly illegal. Because of the tortured and secret trail it took from corporate coffers to Nixon committee headquarters in a suitcase, it is hard to tell whether it was a contribution by a corporation or by a foreign national. It doesn't much matter, though. Both are illegal.

So, there you have it—guns, code names, illegal \$100,000 contributions, a stash of several hundred thousand in cash said to have been controlled by the Attorney General of the United States while he was in office, and burglars caught red-handed in a venture which everybody in authority tries to paint as the bizarre caper of a few misguided individuals. Meanwhile the President tells us his investigation of all this made his Hiss investigation look like a

"Sunday School exercise," and both Mr. Nixon and Mr. Mitchell tell us they don't know what was going on. If that is true, it is an admission of an enormous and irresponsible ignorance. Sen. McGovern has been roundly and thoroughly criticized (and in many instances appropriately, we think) for not having complete control over his staff. But, taking Mr. Nixon and Mr. Mitchell at their words, the McGovern staff operation looks extraordinarily controlled and competent by comparison. Sen. McGovern's people have been accused only of running around with loose tongues. The operatives in behalf of the re-election of the President were apparently running around with loose guns, committing squalid crimes, arrogantly ignoring law and minimal decency. Mr. Nixon can't have it both ways. Either he was responsible for these crimes committed in his behalf by his agents or he was not. If he was not, it amounts to a breathtaking confession of managerial incompetence and a gross abdication of responsibility.