

INVESTIGATORS TERM G.O.P. SPYING A WIDESPREAD ATTEMPT TO INSURE WEAK DEMOCRATIC NOMINEE IN 1972

TEAMS OF AGENTS

Drive Viewed as Way to Help McGovern Get Nomination

By SEYMOUR M. HERSH
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 2—Government investigators say they now have evidence that Republican sabotage and espionage efforts in the election campaign last year were far more widespread than was previously known and were designed to help Senator George McGovern win the Democratic nomination for President.

Republicans viewed Senator McGovern, the eventual nominee, as the weakest candidate President Nixon could face, the investigators said. They added that there was no way of determining how much over-all impact the major Republican intelligence effort, organized at a cost not yet fully estimated, had upon the 1972 primaries.

The investigators said that the espionage program, initially authorized by H. R. Haldeman, the White House chief of staff, who resigned Monday, included at its peak three networks of agents controlled by the White House and the Committee for the Re-election of the President.

The Federal investigators said they had confirmed that at least some allegations about Republican disruption voiced last year by Democratic candidates were substantially correct.

Muskie Camp Infiltrated

These sources said, there is

now evidence that a Nixon supporter was infiltrated into the campaign offices of Senator Edmund S. Muskie, Democrat of Maine, in early 1972. Once there, he intercepted a variety of confidential documents that were subsequently leaked to the press.

The basic Republican strategy was worked out in early 1971, investigators said, when Mr. Nixon was running behind Senator Muskie in public opinion polls. The Harris survey, for example, showed that by early May, 1971, Mr. Muskie had a 47-to-39 per cent lead over the President, an increase of 3 percentage points in three months.

The investigators emphasized that there is no evidence thus far that Republican leaders had held a formal meeting at the White House or elsewhere in

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which they discussed plans to defeat Senator Muskie so as to increase the chance of Senator McGovern, a South Dakota Democrat.

"Nonetheless," one source said, "there was a definite strategy worked out before the election. They tried to make sure that the Democrats nominated their weakest candidate."

In this context, the source said, the bugging of the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate complex here in June, 1972, was only a small part of the over-all effort.

"The Republicans had people in all of the campaigns," one investigator said, "but not at high levels. They had little people nobody would suspect."

"They started playing tricks with the avowed goal of heavily influencing the nomination of the Democratic candidate," he added.

Inquiry by Fraud Unit

Intelligence operations are commonplace in political cam-

paigns and usually include efforts to collect all published information about an opponent along with occasional efforts to obtain advance copies of speeches, travel schedules and the like.

The Justice Department's fraud unit is known to be investigating the Republican espionage activities for possible violations of Federal law.

The prime espionage target throughout late 1971 and in early 1972, investigators said, was Mr. Muskie, whose campaign was repeatedly jarred by inexplicable incidents — such as the disappearance of vital polling data, the misrouting of the candidate's personal plane, and the anonymous "Canuck" letter in the New Hampshire primary that accused Mr. Muskie of casting ethnic slurs on French-Canadians.

"We do have evidence that there was infiltration of the Muskie campaign and that many documents were stolen or photographed," one investigator said.

Letter to Muskie Cited

He specifically cited a private staff letter to Senator Muskie calling on him to stage hearings on a proposed tax bill in California because it would get him "favorable publicity."

The letter, the investigator said, was stolen by an espionage agent and sent to an official in the Republican reelection headquarters who then sent it on to a Washington columnist. When a column about the letter was published a few days later, the source said, an embarrassed Mr. Muskie canceled the proposed hearing.

In a private meeting with a group of Republican Congressmen a little more than a month ago, Mr. Haldeman was reported to have acknowledged being personally responsible for organizing a political intelligence operation in 1972. He was quoted as saying, however, that the project had involved no illegal activities.

The New York Times quoted Government investigators today as saying they had evidence that Mr. Haldeman and John

D. Ehrlichman, MR. NIXON'S chief domestic adviser who also resigned Monday, along with John N. Mitchell, former Attorney General, conspired with at least three other officials to arrange a cover-up story to obstruct a Federal investigation into the full ramifications of the Watergate break-in.

Mr. Mitchell issued the following denial today: "A tory appearing in today's New York Times alleging that I conspired with H. R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman and John Dean [the former White House counsel] to obstruct justice in the Watergate case is absolutely false and without factual foundation."

Mr. Ehrlichman and Mr. Haldeman, meanwhile, were scheduled to testify tomorrow before the Federal grand jury investigating the Watergate break-in and cover-up. Both men have denied any wrongdoing.

Investigators, cautioning that their inquiry was far from complete, provided the following account of how the Republican espionage and sabotage operation developed:

Officials around the President, believed to have been led by Mr. Haldeman, began to become concerned about the 1972 elections in early 1971. At some point, Mr. Haldeman decided that a well-planned and well-financed espionage campaign was needed to insure the nomination of the weakest Democrat candidate.

Funds Being Raised

By that time, Hebert W. Kalmbach, Mr. Nixon's personal attorney, who was a chief campaign fund-raiser, was beginning to collect cash that would later be set aside for the espionage operation.

In June, 1971, when The New York Times began publishing the secret Pentagon papers on the history of the Vietnam war, a White House group, called the "plumbers," was assigned to discover who had made the papers available to the press. E. Howard Hunt Jr. and G. Gordon Liddy, two leading members of the eventual Watergate team, were assigned to the operation.

Hunt, a former agent for the

Central Intelligence Agency, is known to have begun researching the background of potential Democratic Presidential candidates and recruiting a number of former colleagues and associates for his political operation while working with the "plumbers," so named because their job was to stop leaks of information. Hunt coordinated his political activities with Charles W. Colson, a White House special counsel and its chief political operative.

At the same time, Dwight L. Chapin, a Haldeman protégé who was then Mr. Nixon's appointments secretary, got in touch with Mr. Kalmbach to arrange for payments to Donald H. Segretti, a former college classmate who was recruited to direct the espionage operation.

Agents Organized

Over the next 10 months, Mr. Segretti made more than 20 known contacts in his attempt to recruit fellow informers and agents and established a loosely organized network of about 10 agents. Investigators have determined that many of those received substantial cash payments from Mr. Kalmbach. Others were apparently paid in cash by Mr. Segretti.

By early 1972, both Liddy and Hunt had been reassigned to the Republican re-election committee, where they continued to recruit fellow saboteurs, along with a string of informers and obstructionists who were assigned specific campaign targets, investigators said. One key operation was in Florida, where Miami-based anti-Castroites became involved in the state's primary.

In early February, Hunt and Liddy flew to Miami for a meeting with Mr. Segretti that was arranged by Gordon Strachan, another Haldeman aide who helped direct the Segretti operations in the field.

Two Groups Merged

Mr. Haldeman, working through Mr. Strachan and Mr. Chapin, directly controlled the Segretti operation until the Miami meeting. Afterward, Hunt and Liddy both began to direct more of Mr. Segretti's movements, with Mr. Strachan reduced to a monitoring role.

The merging of the Hunt-Liddy operation with the Segretti-Kalmbach-Chapin group, each with its separate informers and agent provocateurs, was considered an important step, making the over-all operation more manageable, investigators said.

As the campaign picked up steam in 1972, hundreds of persons were added to the re-election committee staff and massive infiltration of other campaigns began, using mostly the young.

At least 30, and possibly 40, paid informers were recruited by March by the re-election campaign and were assigned to various Democratic headquarters and offices. Their basic target initially was Senator Muskie, but after his setbacks in the early primaries the youths were assigned to infiltrate the campaigns of the other Democrats believed to be among the leading contenders for the nomination — Senator Hubert H. Humphrey of Minnesota and Henry M. Jackson of Washington, investigators said.

Aim Is Changed

The over-all goal of attacking Senator Muskie was quickly revised; instead the new aim would be to do as much damage as possible to the other leading candidates so as to improve the position of Mr. McGovern.

The Times's sources said the Republicans believed that their biggest triumph came in the Florida primary in March, which was won by Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama.

A few days before the election, a flyer was distributed throughout the state on Muskie stationery accusing both Senator Humphrey and Senator Jackson of illicit sexual activity traced to the re-election effort, the sources said, although that aspect of the inquiry is still going on.