

Plot to Tie Hughes, Democrats Cited

By Jack Anderson

Not long after Bebe Rebozo took a \$100,000 cash gift intended for President Nixon from industrialist Howard Hughes, the President's friend joined in a White House plot to link Hughes to the Democrats.

This amazing double-cross is revealed in confidential White House memos, which we have uncovered in the course of investigating Rebozo's role as a money raiser for the President.

The memos show that in January, 1971, White House staff chief H. R. Haldeman sought to plant stories in the press tying the eccentric Hughes to Democratic National Chairman Larry O'Brien.

This was only a few months after Rebozo had received the last of two \$50,000 installments, paid in \$100 bills, from a Hughes aide. Yet Rebozo apparently had no hesitation to help expose the financial ties between the phantom billionaire and the Democrats.

Rebozo was careful to request, however, that he be kept informed "if any action be taken with regard to Hughes" because of "his own dealings with the Hughes people."

Both Haldeman and Dean, therefore, knew of Rebozo's dealings with Hughes, although the memos don't make clear whether they were aware the billionaire had slipped Rebozo \$100,000 for the President.

Haldeman decided, never-

theless, to go ahead with the plot even if it meant "embarrassing" Hughes. Haldeman instructed Dean, however, to keep "Bebe out of it at all cost."

Haldeman asked White House counsel John Dean in a memo, dated Jan. 18, 1971, to begin "an inquiry into the relationship between Larry O'Brien and Howard Hughes."

Dean reported back his "preliminary findings" on Jan. 26, 1971. Among others, Dean spoke to Rebozo.

"I discussed the matter with Bebe Rebozo who indicated that his information regarding (a retainer paid by Hughes to O'Brien) had come from Robert Maheu, the recently released head of Hughes' Nevada operation," reported Dean.

"Bebe said that this information had come to his attention at a time when Maheu was professing considerable friendliness towards the administration, but that it was not documented information. Bebe indicated that he felt that Maheu had possibly retained O'Brien for his services without any direct knowledge by Hughes himself.

"Bebe is under the impression that Maheu had a good bit of freedom with Hughes' money when running the Nevada operation. Bebe further indicated that he felt he could acquire some documentation of this fact if given a little time and that he would proceed to

try to get any information he could.

"He also requested that if any action be taken with regard to Hughes that he be notified because of his familiarity with the delicacy of the relationships as a result of his own dealings with the Hughes people."

Dean also reported that Robert Bennett, son of Sen. Wallace Bennett (R-Utah) represented Hughes. "Bennett informs me," wrote Dean, "that there is no doubt about the fact that Larry O'Brien was retained by Howard Hughes and the contract is still in existence. . . . Bennett also indicated that he felt confident that if it was necessary to document the retainer with O'Brien that he could get the (documents)."

Two days after receiving Dean's report, Haldeman sent him confidential instructions.

"You should continue to keep in contact with Bob Bennett, as well as looking for other sources of information on this subject," Haldeman directed. "Once Bennett gets back to you with his final report, you and Chuck Colson should get together and come up with a way to leak the appropriate information.

"Frankly, I can't see any way to handle this without involving Hughes. The problem of 'embarrassing' him seems to be a matter of degree. However, we should keep Bob Bennett and

Bebe out of it at all costs. . . ."

As it happened, we were the recipients of the White House leak. We reported on Aug. 6, 1971, that "Hughes' lieutenants offered to subsidize Larry O'Brien so he could serve without pay as Democratic National Chairman during the 1968 campaign."

We quoted O'Brien, who acknowledged he had been "sounded out by Maheu in 1968" but insisted he "never drew a dime from the Hughes interests during the campaign." Several months later, we reported, O'Brien was retained by Hughes.

We have spoken to O'Brien again for an updated comment. "If they'd wanted to know about my relationship to Hughes," he said, "They could have looked at the public record. . . . If they didn't want to look at the public record, they could have saved themselves the trouble by simply calling me on the telephone."

O'Brien said his fee was "a personal matter between me and my clients." But in a letter to Maheu, dated Aug. 21, 1968, O'Brien said his "annual fee would be \$180,000, payable in monthly installments."

Haldeman told us through his lawyer that he remembers the exchange of memos but doesn't remember the outcome. Dean and Rebozo refused to comment.

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