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A Master Plan To Win Votes



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A MASTER PLAN for using the government machinery to win votes for President Nixon in 1972 is laid out in memos which the White House is still trying to suppress.

The memos, stamped for the "Eyes Only" of top Nixon aides, assign former White House staff chief H. R. Haldeman the job of seeing "that (government) programs are responsive to and coordinated with campaign needs."

One memo reveals that "We have already started a number of thrusts to ensure that the power of the incumbency is used." In plainer language, this meant that the President was using his power over the government to generate votes.

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THE MASTER PLAN, at least in part, was put into effect. Grants were given to ethnic groups which supported the President. High-paying patronage jobs were offered to powerful politicians to lure them on the Nixon bandwagon. Government contracts went to the favored. Those who opposed Mr. Nixon were squeezed out.

The plan was drafted by White House efficiency expert Fred Malek, who is now the President's deputy chief budget officer. His 1972 co-schemers were Haldeman and John Mitchell. The latter was then preparing to step down as attorney general to become the President's campaign chief.

The Malek memos, dated February 16, 1972, are written in the high Watergate

literary style which seeks to conceal from outsiders what it discloses to insiders. Yet a close reading shows how the White House planned to gear government policies to politics.

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UNDER HALDEMAN'S guidance, according to the memos, the White House domestic council was already "posturing the President correctly . . . on major issues" to gain maximum political exploitation.

Haldeman also was supposed to work through George Shultz, then the Federal budget boss with control over the purse strings, to make sure that government departments cooperated.

Malek himself was to "strengthen responsiveness of patronage to campaign needs." This would include such tactics as throwing judgeships to powerful minority leaders. Malek also would guide government grants to opinion molders among ethnic, aging and other special groups.

My associate Les Whitten reached Malek at the White House. The plan, Malek insisted, was never fully put into effect. "That wasn't done," he said. The proposals were merely "talking points," some of which never came up in his key meetings with Mitchell and Haldeman, Malek said.

Contrary to his assurances, however, our investigation found that many features of the plan were implemented. We will write more about this in future columns.