

Story of Cover-Up At San Clemente



Jack Anderson

THE TAXPAYERS were never supposed to find out how their money was squandered on President Nixon's San Clemente estate.

The story of the cover-up is told in documents that have now fallen into our hands. They should have been open to the public under the Freedom of Information Act. But when we sought them, the building supervisor at San Clemente, Carl Davis, suggested that "if so desired, these files could be accidentally misplaced."

I assigned my associate Brit Hume in September 1972, to investigate the San Clemente renovations. Brit's inquiries touched off an alarm inside the General Services Administration, which supervised the project.

★ ★ ★

THE DOCUMENTS show that Brit questioned the construction engineer, William Robinson, on September 28, 1972. "Mr. Hume identified himself as being from Jack Anderson's office," reports a classified memo, "and was aware that Bill Robinson was the contracting officer at the Western White House.

"It was apparent from the conversation that Mr. Hume was aware of all the contracts, scope of work, dollar amounts and contract numbers for all of the work which was done by Bill . . . Mr. Hume said it appeared there was something fishy going on and said he would like to see the records. Bill told him he no longer had any records . . . Instead of producing the records, however, GSA investigated how we learned about the misuse of money at San Clemente. There were urgent calls between San Clemente and Washing-

ton. E. W. Baughman, the regional director in charge of public buildings, reported:

"I . . . received a call from Rick Fanske who had been in contact with Larry Roush and Frank Price (all GSA officials), and they wanted me to ascertain before the close of business who leaked the information to Hume, or how he obtained it."

★ ★ ★

AS PART of the cover-up, the work done for the President at San Clemente was known by the secret code name, "Project Sunrise." Recounted Baughman in his classified memo: "I called a quick meeting of those people who were knowledgeable on Operation Sunrise . . .

"I also at this time contacted Ernest Garbarino, building manager, Western White House field office, and asked him to contact the city building department to determine what information they had available on the Western White House construction, and if this information was available to the public.

"Ernie called back and reported that Mr. Carl Davis, who is in charge of the building department at San Clemente, advised the files . . . are available to the public . . . Mr. Davis indicated to Ernie that if so desired these files could be accidentally misplaced."

Despite the effort to obstruct our investigation, we were able to publish the first report on October 3, 1972, that the President was renovating his old Spanish villa in San Clemente, in part, with public funds.