

THE 1972 CAMPAIGN

Ziegler Denies an Article Linking Haldeman to Fund

Angrily Rebukes Washington Post for Campaign Money Report—Official Gives 'Assurances' to MacGregor

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 25—The White House, appearing increasingly restive about the so-called "corruption" issue in the presidential campaign, angrily denied today a news report linking President Nixon's chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, with a "secret fund" allegedly used to underwrite a reported campaign of political espionage.

At his morning briefing, Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, repeated a White House statement issued last night that the story was "untrue," and accused The Washington Post, which published the allegation, of "shabby journalism" and "a blatant effort at character assassination."

Simultaneously, at the Committee for the Re-election of the President, the campaign director, Clark MacGregor, said he had received "personal assurances" from Mr. Haldeman that he had no authority to dis-

tribute political motives to The Post's coverage of the espionage issue, accusing that paper of "operating in close philosophical and strategic cooperation" with the McGovern campaign.

The two statements represented the first flat, official denial of any of the recent allegations printed in The Washington Post and other newspapers and magazines linking officials close to the President with the alleged espionage campaign and the "fund" used to finance it.

No Denials Before

Mr. Ziegler's previous tactic has been to denounce the charges and the newspaper that has printed most of them, The Post, without explicitly denying the allegations. He has denounced but has not denied, for example, allegations linking the espionage campaign with Dwight Chapin, a junior White House aide who is close to both the President and Mr. Haldeman.

Mr. Ziegler's explanation as to why the Administration had decided to intensify its counter-attack was explicit: the charges, he said, were simply untrue and required rebuttal.

"It's just gone too far," he said in the course of an unusually passionate and at times bitter attack on The Post that included, again for the first time, a criticism of The Post's executive editor, Benjamin Bradlee. Mr. Ziegler said it would not be difficult to establish that Mr. Bradlee was "not a supporter of the president."

Mr. Bradlee had no comment on Mr. Ziegler's charges about him. As for Mr. Ziegler's other charges, he said: "We stand by our story."

The vigor of the Administration's counterattack suggested to some observers, however, that Mr. Nixon's strategists and perhaps even the President himself were growing increasingly concerned about the cumulative impact of the articles and had decided that strong counter-

measures were required to prevent erosion in Mr. Nixon's lead over his challenger, Senator George McGovern of South Dakota.

McGovern Uses Issue

In addition, Mr. McGovern himself has shown no reluctance to accept the accuracy of the charges and to use them, with increasing frequency, in his campaign speeches. His television address tonight dealt largely with the corruption and espionage issue.

In its article this morning The Post said that Mr. Haldeman was one of several key officials with authority to approve payments from a "secret" fund. The paper identified its sources as "Federal investigators"—none of whom it named—as well as "accounts of sworn testimony before a grand jury" given earlier by Hugh W. Sloan Jr., former treasurer of the Nixon campaign.

The paper did not, however, say at any point that Mr. Haldeman had in fact authorized disbursements from the "fund" for purposes of sabotage or espionage. It asserted

that such a fund existed and that he had partial authority over it.

Mr. Ziegler sought to rebut The Post on several specific points. He said Mr. Haldeman had never had "access" to such a fund and that, in fact, such a fund never existed.

"I'm told that there is no secret fund," he said at one point, adding later, "Mr. Dean informed me that there was no secret fund."

The Mr. Dean to whom the press secretary referred is John W. Dean 3d, the White House counsel who conducted an internal investigation at the President's request following the arrest of several persons employed by the re-election campaign in the Watergate offices of the Democratic National Committee.

After the investigation, Mr. Nixon told a news conference that he was satisfied that no one "presently employed" in the White House was involved in the Watergate bugging.

On Aug. 26, the General Accounting Office, the investigative arm of Congress, disclosed that the Nixon campaign organization maintained a cash fund of \$350,000 and kept it in a safe in the office of Maruice H. Stans, finance chairman of the re-election committee. That fund quickly became known in newspaper shorthand as a "secret" fund that, according to The Post, "financed an apparently unprecedented spying and sabotage campaign."

Mr. Ziegler further asserted that Mr. Sloan's attorney had denied that Mr. Sloan, whose sworn testimony was cited by The Post as one of the sources of its article, had given such testimony to the grand jury.

In a related development to

day, John J. Sirica, the Chief Judge of the United States District Court here, denied most of the motions filed on behalf of the seven men indicted in the Watergate break-in.

Change of Venue Denied

The judge denied several motions to dismiss the indictment against E. Howard Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy and a motion on behalf of all seven to have the trial moved from Washington.

William O. Bittman, the defense lawyer for Mr. Hunt, argued that the publicity on the case was so intense in the capital that it would be impossible to pick an impartial jury.

Judge Sirica, however, said that he would not grant the change of venue unless it became apparent during the questioning of prospective jurors that they could not be fair.

Earl J. Silbert, the assistant United States attorney and chief prosecutor in the case, estimated that the trial might last from two to three weeks and would be narrowly focused on the bugging of the Democratic headquarters.



Associated Press

Ronald L. Ziegler, White House press secretary, at news session yesterday.