

Wider GOP Sabotage Reported

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Washington

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 S. McGovern win the Democratic nomination for President.

Republicans felt that McGovern, the eventual nominee, was the weakest candidate Mr. Nixon could face.

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.

Federal investigators said there is now evidence that a Nixon supporter was infiltrated into the campaign offices of Senator Edmund S. Muskie (Dem-Maine) in early 1972. Once there, he intercepted a variety of confidential documents that were subsequently leaked to the press.

STRATEGY

The basic Republican strategy was worked out in early 1971, investigators said, when Mr. Nixon was running behind Muskie in public opinion polls. The Harris survey, for example, showed that by early May, 1971, 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 Republi-

can leaders had held a formal meeting at the White House or elsewhere in which they discussed plans to defeat Muskie so as to increase the chances of McGovern.

"Nonetheless," one source said, "there was a definite

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strategy worked out before the election. They tried to make sure that the Democrats nominated their weakest candidate."

WATERGATE

In this context, the source said, the bugging of the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate complex 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 goals of heavily influencing the nomination of the Democratic candidate," he added.

COMMON

Intelligence operations are commonplace in political campaigns 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 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 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.

In a private meeting with

a group of Republican congressmen a little more than month ago, 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.

ACCOUNT

Investigators provided the following account of how the Republican espionage and sabotage operation developed:

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

By that time, Herbert W. Kalmbach, the President'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.

PAPERS

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 CIA, 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.

SEGRETTI

At the same time, Dwight L. Chapin, a Haldeman protégé who was then Mr. Nixon's appointments secre-

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tary, got in touch with Kalmbach to arrange for payments to Donald H. Segretti, a former college classmate who was recruited to direct the espionage operation.

Over the next ten months, Segretti made more than 20 known contacts in his attempt to recruit fellow informers and agents and established a loosely organized network of about ten agents.

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 that state's primary.

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

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

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

INFILTRATE

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.

The over-all goal of attacking 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 McGovern.