

CIA Memos Cite White House Role

By Jack Anderson

Declaring "it was the President's wish," H. R. Haldeman asked the CIA last June to intervene with the FBI to limit the Watergate investigation to the five men who were arrested inside Democratic Party headquarters.

He promised that acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III "would be receptive as he was looking for guidance on the matter." The once-powerful Haldeman has been deposed as White House chief of staff.

From our CIA sources, we have obtained internal memos which claim the CIA's two bosses at the time, Director Richard Helms and Deputy Director Vernon Walters, were summoned to the White House on June 23, 1972, less than a week after the Waterbuggers were caught.

Haldeman told them the incident "was getting embarrassing" and asked Walters to call on Gray and suggest that the arrest of the five suspects "should be sufficient and that it was not advantageous to have the inquiry pushed. . ."

Obediently, Walters saw Gray the same day. "I reported," Walters recorded afterward, "that if the investigations were pushed 'south of the border,' it could trespass on some of our covert pro-

jects, and in view of the fact that the five men involved were under arrest, it would be best to taper the matter further."

Gray was quoted in the CIA memos as suggesting the "problem was how to low key this matter now that it was launched." He said, "this was a most awkward matter to come up during an election year, and he would see what he could do."

The account of the White House attempt to suppress the investigation is contained in a memo which Walters dictated on June 28, 1972. It describes the June 23 meeting with Haldeman and John Ehrlichman in Ehrlichman's White House office.

Declares the Walter's memo: "Haldeman said that the 'bugging' affair at the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate apartments had made a lot of noise and the Democrats were trying to maximize it.

"The investigation was leading to a lot of important people, and this could get worse. He asked what the connection with the Agency was, and the Director repeated that there was none.

"Haldeman said the whole affair was getting embarrassing, and it was the President's wish that Walters call on act-

ing FBI Director Patrick Gray and suggest to him that since the five suspects had been arrested, that this should be sufficient and that it was not advantageous to have the enquiry pushed, especially in Mexico, etc.

"Director Helms said that he had talked to Gray on the previous day and had made plain to him that the Agency was not behind this matter, that it was not connected with it and none of the suspects were working for nor had worked for the Agency in the last two years.

"He had told Gray that none of his investigations was touching any covert projects of the Agency, current or ongoing.

"Haldeman then stated that I could tell Gray that I had talked to the White House and suggest that the investigation not be pushed further. Gray would be receptive as he was looking for guidance on the matter.

"The Director repeated that the Agency was unconnected with the matter. I then agreed to talk to Gray as directed. Ehrlichman implied I could do this soon, and I said I would try to do it today. . .

"On returning to the office, I called Gray, indicated that this was a matter of some urgency and he agreed to see me at 1430 (2:30) that day."

In other words, the White House pair directed Walters to intervene with the FBI, despite repeated disclaimers that the CIA was involved in the Waterbugging or could be hurt by the FBI investigation.

Indeed, Helms had already made it plain to Gray that the FBI investigation wouldn't jeopardize any covert CIA operation. Walters, nevertheless, carried out the White House orders and spoke to Gray about tapering the investigation. Subsequently, the CIA resisted White House pressure to participate in the Watergate cover-up.

The CIA memos also entangle President Nixon in the coverup. Haldeman said the intervention with the FBI "was the President's wish." Of course, Haldeman may have misused the President's name. But it took another 10 months for a reluctant Mr. Nixon to fire Haldeman and Ehrlichman. Then he praised them in the process.

For another month, the two aides continued to use White House offices and to ride around in White House limousines. The public was treated to the spectacle, for example, of the accused pair showing up at the courthouse in a gleaming White House limousine to answer charges against them.