



NATIONAL AFFAIRS

BIG DEALS IN SAN CLEMENTE

As if Watergate weren't enough, yet another embarrassment bobbed up last week to haunt President Nixon—the curious story of how he came to be lord of the manor at La Casa Pacifica, his palmy, 29-acre estate in San Clemente, Calif. Questions about the deal had been bobbing up ever since Mr. Nixon bought the mansion that

is now the Western White House in 1969 for \$1.5 million. Two weeks ago the Santa Ana Register reported that Mr. Nixon might have paid off the mortgage with money left over from his 1968 Presidential campaign. The report brought an angry denial from the White House.

But when the details were finally released last week, the story got curiously and curiously. As the White House told it, the original down payment was financed by a \$625,000 loan to the President from his friend Robert G. Abplanalp, the millionaire machinist who perfected the aerosol spray valve. The deal was handled by Mr. Nixon's former personal lawyer, Herbert Kalmbach, the man who ran the \$1.7 million campaign fund that was tapped in 1972 to pay the Watergate burglars.

Originally, Mr. Nixon had hoped to sell all but 5.9 acres of the property to a "suitable buyer"—perhaps the trustees of a proposed Nixon Presidential library. But as the White House told it last week, Abplanalp himself bought the land nearly two and a half years ago, for \$1,249,000. Oddly enough, no deed was recorded.

Whatever questions remained, the President could boast of a notable deal. After all the intricacies were netted out, he owned one of the choicest homes in California for a total investment of \$374,514—and thus far he had actually paid just \$33,500.

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approved felonies?" Jeered another: "You certainly know enough about law to know that, Fred." At yet another point, a reporter demanded furiously when the President was going to submit to questioning himself; the answer, leaked informally later, was, not until the press stops shouting at his people.

The scene was ill-tempered, but the statement looked little better on second reading. It pledged at the outset not to put "a national security cover" on Watergate—and proceeded to put one on parts of the Watergate cover-up and most of the collateral scandals as well. It moderated the President's position only enough to accommodate damaging evidence that had already come out and to keep other embarrassments—notably the Dean papers—bottled up.

What He Didn't Say

Otherwise, the statement pleaded Mr. Nixon's innocence of everything. It referred only glancingly or not at all to the related fast practices Watergate has come to stand for—the political dirty tricks, the under-the-table funding, the shredding and burnbagging of evidence, the influence-peddling case that brought a former Attorney General and a former Commerce Secretary under indictment. And it refused to acknowledge the clear linkages between the 1969-71 secret-police operations sanctioned by the President and the 1972 political marauding that he says caught him by surprise. They had "no connection," said Mr. Nixon. But they did, in style, zeal, method, personnel—and soul.

The statement was vulnerable as well on point after specific point:

■ **The Hoover Problem:** The passage in the statement about the low estate of American intelligence gathering in the last days of J. Edgar Hoover amounted

to a confession by the President that he couldn't control or fire the man he held responsible. "If the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover wasn't dependable," one GOP senator asked, "why keep him on?" One well-wired source offered NEWSWEEK a reason: Hoover had in his files some materials regarded by the Administration as "very, very damaging to persons on the White House staff," and he was not above using them to insure his tenure in office. He served, in any case, until his death a year ago; his most private files were thereafter removed to his home by his deputy and lifelong friend Clyde Tolson and have never surfaced.

■ **The Ellsberg Break-in:** The President's apparent inability to cope with Hoover led in turn, by his own narrative, to the creation of his own security-police unit when the Pentagon papers broke. The available evidence suggested that he overreacted—that the publication of the papers was far more an embarrassment than a threat to national security and that the FBI in any event had known for more than a year that Ellsberg had been copying the documents. Mr. Nixon nevertheless put his plumbers on the case; his protest that he would never have approved a burglary in *this* national-security case sorted oddly with his admission that he had said yes to a whole run of them—at least in theory—the year before. His defense, indeed, rested on the odd proposition that he had been concerned enough about intelligence leaks to create a covert-operations unit, but not enough to ask thereafter what it was doing.

Mr. Nixon did not even mention that his black squad had drawn the CIA into the caper in a support role, in plain violation of the laws barring it from domestic operations. The agency's former director, Richard Helms, now in less-than-happy exile as ambassador to

Iran, and its surviving deputy director, Lt. Gen. Vernon Walters, toured Capitol Hill last week trying—apparently successfully—to persuade the agency's friends there that they went along reluctantly under White House pressure and even then were unaware that it was a burglary they were supporting. NEWSWEEK learned that the agency had in fact bugged one of its own offices the day plumber Hunt came to pick up his disguise, faked papers and other paraphernalia; the logs suggest that Hunt ducked questions about what he was up to and answered only that it was a high-level White House mission.

■ **The Ellsberg Cover-up:** Mr. Nixon did a fast semantic two-step suggesting that, far from trying to cover up the burglary, he had in fact ordered on April 25 that it be reported "immediately" to the Ellsberg trial judge, W. Matthew Byrne. But new evidence indicated that he had in fact been sitting on the information for a month—a silence that put a more damning cast than ever on the affair and on the President's credibility. The agent of his embarrassment was his new Attorney General, Elliot Richardson, who testified at his confirmation hearing that the President himself had mentioned having heard about the break-in from Dean in late March. At that time, the White House insisted, his information was still fragmentary. But the fact remained that the President had at least an inkling of the burglary when his man Ehrlichman twice offered the FBI directorship to Judge Byrne in early April—and when he himself chatted with the judge at one of the two trysts.

■ **The CIA Connection:** The President defended his having limited the Watergate investigation in part by citing his unattributed tip that the CIA might have been involved and should be protected. But both Helms and Walters told Con-