

... the C.I.A. ...

The memoranda prepared by Central Intelligence Agency officials published in The Times on Monday spell out in painfully clear detail the Nixon Administration's effort to pervert the C.I.A. for its own domestic political purposes.

In the first of these memoranda, Gen. Vernon A. Walters, deputy director of C.I.A., set down what Richard Helms, the head of C.I.A., told H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman in the latter's office at the White House on June 23, 1972:

"Director Helms said he had talked to Gray [the acting director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation] on the previous day and made plain to him that the agency [C.I.A.] was not behind this matter and that it was not connected with it. None of the suspects was working for it nor had worked for the agency in the last two years. He had told Gray that none of his investigators was touching any covert projects of the agency, current or ongoing."

In any properly run Administration, that definitive statement from the head of the C.I.A. should have ended any further discussion. But the Nixon men were obviously not deterred for a moment.

"Haldeman then stated that I could tell Gray that I had talked to the White House and suggested that the investigation not be pushed further. . . . I then agreed to talk to Gray, as directed," the Walters memorandum continues.

The question immediately arises—why did the White House not convey its instructions directly to Mr. Gray? It is sad that General Walters evidently felt it necessary to accept this demeaning assignment, but after two weeks of play-acting he refused to be used any further. On July 6, he told Mr. Gray: "In all honesty I could not tell him to cease future investigations on the grounds that it would compromise the security interests of the United States."

Meanwhile, John Dean, the President's counsel, had tried to draw the C.I.A. more deeply into the conspiracy by suggesting that the agency provide bail for the defendants and pay their salaries, requests which the C.I.A. wisely rejected.

President Nixon's responsibility for this perversion of the C.I.A. is heavy. Since Mr. Haldeman was the President's chief aide and since only the President can command the C.I.A., the authority behind the instructions was evident.

Mr. Nixon has already admitted some responsibility: "I instructed Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman to insure that the investigation of the break-in not expose either an unrelated covert operation of the C.I.A. or activities of the White House investigations unit—and to see that this was personally coordinated between General Walters and Mr. Gray."

Since no "unrelated covert operation" of the C.I.A. was endangered, the agency was being used as a screen to protect the White House investigation unit, the so-called "plumbers." The activities of these plumbers have not yet been fully investigated and exposed, but it is already clear that some of their secret deeds were illegal.

It is also clear that it was grossly improper for President Nixon to attempt to conceal those deeds behind the facade of the C.I.A.