

Haldeman Says He Knew of Key Watergate

DENIES HE KNEW OF LAW-BREAKING

Ex-Aide's Testimony Remains Vague as to Why Facts Were Not Disclosed

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WASHINGTON, July 31 — H. R. Haldeman testified today that he had learned a number of details about several of the more controversial aspects of the Watergate affair long before they became public.

In his second day of questioning by the Senate Watergate committee, Mr. Haldeman, the former chief of staff at the White House, stressed that he had not understood any of the events to have been illegal or improper.

But he has said that he, President Nixon and John D. Ehrlichman, the President's former domestic adviser, were eager during the campaign last year to disclose as many details of the Watergate affair as possible.

"The view of all three of us through the whole period was that the truth must be told, and quickly," Mr. Haldeman said in his opening statement yesterday, "although we did not know what the truth was."

Testimony Vague

It remains somewhat vague so far in Mr. Haldeman's testimony as to why the facts available to him were not made public. He has indicated, however, that John W. Dean 3d, the former counsel to the President, blocked the alleged impulse in some cases.

"His concern, as I understood it, was that the case was complex, it involved rights of defendants and other legal complexities, the facts were not clear, and that nothing should be done publicly," Mr. Haldeman said.

But Mr. Haldeman, who was senior to Mr. Dean at the White House, has maintained in his Senate testimony and before that the facts suggested no law-breaking. And they were much clearer inside the White House than outside it.

For example, it was not until last January that rumors began to circulate indicating that Nixon campaign funds had been used to pay the seven men indicted in the Watergate conspiracy, and it was not until months later that such payments were established.

Testifies on Payments

Mr. Haldeman testified today that he had learned "sometime in the period shortly after the Watergate break-in" of payments "for the legal fees and for family support of the defendants." This exchange with Samuel Dash, the chief counsel of the Committee, followed:

Q. Did you ask why Mr. [John N.] Mitchell, who was heading up the campaign, and Mr. Dean, who was counsel to the President,

would be involved in raising funds to pay for legal fees, and families of burglars and wiretappers?

A. No, I did not. This was incidental information that I received and dismissed. I did not pursue it in any way.

Q. Well, did you consider that if that became public that it might be a matter of embarrassment to the campaign?

A. No, I did not consider that. . . . had I thought that the Committee [for the Re-election of the President] was going to conduct its business in a way that would embarrass the President, I would have raised that question.

Q. Do you believe that spending political campaign funds to pay for the defense of criminal defendants could embarrass the President? A. I don't know. . . . it depends on the circumstances and situation, I think.

Q. What about these circumstances and this situation involving the Watergate?

A. I don't know that I can make a judgment on that. I again don't know clearly yet what the circumstances actually are.

The committee has heard testimony that more than \$400,000 in campaign funds was paid to the defendants.

Fragmentary Reports

It was not until last March that the public began to receive fragmentary reports of two meetings in Mr. Mitchell's office at the Justice Department at which spying on the Democrats had been discussed.

Mr. Mitchell and others present have insisted that the proposals for wiretapping were turned down on both occasions. But they had been offered by G. Gordon Liddy, and Liddy was soon implicated in the Watergate wiretapping.

Mr. Haldeman said it was his "general recollection" that he had learned of the meetings from Mr. Dean last summer. He added that Mr. Dean may have reported to him earlier, just after the second meeting on Feb. 4, 1972.

Mr. Haldeman also said he could not remember receiving a memorandum subsequently that included a report on a \$300,000 "sophisticated intelligence plan" at the President's re-election organization.

He also said he could not recall ordering an aide, Gordon C. Strachan, to instruct Liddy

"to transfer his capabilities" from Senator Edmund S. Muskie of Maine to Senator George McGovern of South Dakota, who were then seeking the Democratic Presidential nomination.

General Description

After Liddy and E. Howard Hunt Jr. were implicated in the Watergate conspiracy, their work at the White House during 1971 was described by the Administration in general terms.

Hunt, for example, who worked there as a consultant, was said to have been concerned with declassification of the Pentagon papers and to have been working on international narcotics traffic problems.

He and Liddy were actually engaged in a covert program dealing with disclosure of the papers, a program that included the burglary in September, 1971, of the office of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

Mr. Haldeman said he had been unaware that Hunt and Liddy broke into the office, but he said he would "guess" he knew that they had been members of the covert group known as the "plumbers."

The term emerged vaguely and inaccurately last summer, but the dimensions of the group's activities did not become clear until this year. Mr. Haldeman said he had been aware that the group had been set up to investigate the leak of the Pentagon papers "and other national security leaks at that time."

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Events Before They Became Public