

'Friends' of the White House

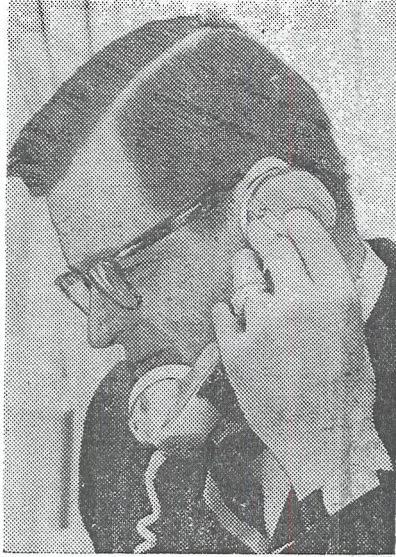
Senate investigators have obtained "eyes-only" White House memoranda documenting two attempted interventions—both apparently aborted—by Presidential lieutenant Charles W. Colson and his deputy in behalf of two Nixon supporters, one under federal indictment and the other threatened with possible federal prosecution.

A memo from Colson, who left the White House staff March 10, urged that a federal indictment against Nixonite Pittsburgh labor leader F. G. Gualtieri be "worked out" and "disposed of."

Another from Colson's deputy Richard Howard, still on the White House staff, proposed that the Justice Department clear Maryland Nixon contributor Harry W. Rodgers III in regard to possible violations of federal election laws.

Charges against Gualtieri were later dismissed. No charges were ever brought against Rodgers. Still, there is absolutely no evidence this was caused by White House interference. To the contrary, the two requests from Colson's office probably were never relayed beyond the White House counsel's office.

Nevertheless, the memoranda buttress contentions by present White House staffers that attempted interventions in the judicial process represented a recurrent pattern by Colson, President Nixon's top political trouble-



Charles W. Colson

shooter. Mr. Nixon's senior advisers now call such solicitude for White House "friends"—as well as punitive action against "enemies"—inexcusable and unacceptable. When Colson appears before the Ervin committee next month, he will be questioned closely about meddling in the judicial process.

Gualtieri, business agent for Boiler-makers Union Local 154 in Pittsburgh, was one of many hard-hat labor leaders backing Mr. Nixon's re-election in the New Majority Colson was building. On Feb. 29, 1972, Gualtieri was indicted in Pittsburgh on three counts of embezzlement (allegedly using unauthorized funds on trips to union conventions).

By midsummer, Colson was outraged at the Nixon administration's harassing a Nixon labor man. He fired off a July 15 memo to Don Rodgers, a former union official serving as White House coordinator with labor, to contact deputy White House counsel Fred Fielding.

"Get together with Fred Fielding immediately—John Dean's deputy. This is one that has to be worked out. Fred should take it up directly with (then Atty. Gen. Richard) Kleindienst, or John Dean should. I can't do anything with this, but it's one that is absolutely essential that it be disposed of in a correct form."

Colson concluded: "Please get this done today."

Fielding told us Rodgers asked him what could be done for Gualtieri. "Nothing," was his reply, according to Fielding. Indeed, prosecutors in Pittsburgh informed us there was no interference from Washington. Charges were dismissed Sept. 20 by U.S. District Judge Hubert Teitlebaum on grounds that Gualtieri's expenditures were authorized.

Colson told us he has no recollection of the memo, adding it was not written in "my style." Nor, he said, does he recall Howard's memo to then White House counsel Dean after late 1972 articles in the Baltimore Sun regarding Baltimore land developer Rodgers, Maryland state chairman of "Democrats for Nixon." The stories suggested that Rodgers, by contributing to the Nixon campaign while receiving income from federal leases, was violating federal law.

In the memo to Dean labelled "confidential, eyes only," Howard warned: "The Democratic establishment is trying to get Harry Rodgers . . . and they're trying to use every way possible to discredit him." Howard's solution: "What is needed here is a judgment by Assistant Atty. Gen. (Henry) Petersen that there is no violation here."

Howard did not hide the political underpinning. "You would probably have to sue every one of the President's major contributors because I would be willing to bet almost all of them do business with the government in some form," he said. Howard also cautioned against State Atty. Gen. Francis B. Burch's entering the case "because he is in cahoots with the other Democrats in the state and out to get Harry Rodgers."

Rodgers was never charged, but apparently not because of Howard's memo. Dean could not be reached, but close associates say he buried Howard's memo. Howard would not talk to us.

So, neither memorandum apparently tampered with the judicial system. Nor, according to White House aides, did similar proposals cascading from Colson's office.

But Colson's conviction that Nixon "friends" deserved preferential judicial treatment, just as "enemies" deserved punishment, described a White House psychology that led to the Watergate disasters.