

Johnson and Nixon Pressured the CIA



Longer version, WXP, filed CIA.

Jack Anderson

THE PRELIMINARY, secret testimony in the CIA investigation has focused on the White House itself.

Former CIA chief Richard Helms, according to sources close to the investigation, testified behind closed doors that he had been pressured by both Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon to spy on Vietnam War protesters.

As far back as 1967, Helms alleged, Mr. Johnson began badgering him to investigate any connection between the protest movement and foreign enemies.

Both Mr. Johnson and Mr. Nixon suspected that the Communists were pumping money into the antiwar movement. However, Helms reported that the CIA found no significant foreign influence.

Some radical groups, such as the Black Panthers and the Weathermen, had foreign contacts. But the student opposition to the war effort was largely an American phenomenon, said Helms.

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HIS SECRET testimony was taken by the President's Commission to Investigate the Central Intelligence Agency. Other witnesses confirmed that the CIA files on American citizens largely grew out of the Johnson-Nixon concern over the antiwar agitation.

At first, the Secret Service began investigating every group, no matter how innocent, that expressed the slightest criticism of the President.

By late 1970, the Secret Service developed a computer network, which now con-

tains information on more than 180,000 Americans. Other government agencies also began trading information. Files began to grow on tens of thousands of citizens who were guilty of nothing more serious than shooting off their mouths against the President's policies.

The CIA, of course, got caught up in the hysteria. There were times when the CIA overstepped its legal limits and conducted domestic surveillance. It became increasingly difficult to draw the line between legitimate security and political security.

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THIS WAS the atmosphere in the backrooms of the CIA when the Watergate caper began. The CIA didn't balk, therefore, at furnishing E. Howard Hunt with a reddish wig, glasses, a speech alteration device, a set of alias documents, a tape recorder concealed in a portable typewriter case, two microphones and a camera disguised in a tobacco pouch.

Hunt used this James Bond paraphernalia to carry out his Watergate assignments. The CIA has insisted in secret statements that it had no knowledge of Hunt's Watergate role. The supply officer, Cleo Gephart, has sworn that he thought Hunt was a member of the CIA's Domestic Contact Service.

This is the branch that interviews U.S. travelers who might pick up interesting information abroad. Gephart didn't explain why Hunt would need a fancy disguise if he were merely conducting routine interviews.

Today's column is by Jack Anderson and Les Whitten