

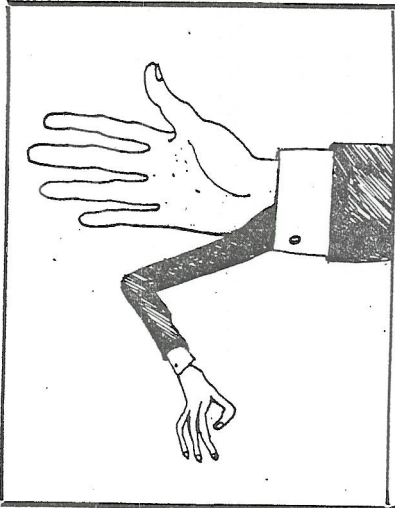
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Black Propaganda

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By Paul Chevigny

So much publicity has been focused on the details of the Watergate affair that we are in danger of forgetting that the break-in itself was but a night's work in a much larger plan of infiltration and distortion. An enormous slush fund was established; a lawyer was put to work recruiting people to pose as bona fide volunteers for the Democratic campaign; finally, documents were forged purporting to contain the policies of Democratic campaigners in the effort to create bogus issues. It is hard to know just where the burglary fit into this de-



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sign, but it is clear that it was part of a coordinated effort to know the opposition's plans and head them off.

It is fitting that former C.I.A. people should be the agents of the design because the devices of the countercampaign were typically those of counterespionage. Black propaganda—provocative statements or actions which appear to come from the adversary, but are actually your own—is an accepted ploy in the international bag of dirty tricks. In national politics, however, infiltration and provocation on the grand scale is a creation of recent years. Since the late sixties, signs of

provocation in official police work have been turning up with unprecedented frequency. In the Harrisburg case, the Government's chief witness made an offer to a nun to obtain an "untraceable" gun for the commission of a crime. The Camden 28 case, charging the destruction of draft files, was created by an informer who has sworn that the crime would have been impossible without his funds and inspiration. We learn of a provocateur in the ranks of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Finally, even disenchanted law enforcement officers have begun to unburden themselves. Former F.B.I. agent Robert Wall tells us that during a radical convention in Washington, F.B.I. agents sent a forged letter, purporting to be from one faction, demanding a \$20,000 tribute from another group. That sort of propaganda brings us full circle, because it so much resembles the false letters that infiltrators prepared in the Democratic campaign. Watergate is only a piece of the massive use of infiltration and distortion in domestic politics and law enforcement.

The worst evil of infiltration and provocation is not that it gives rise to burglaries, or that it induces public officials to tell lies about everything including one another. The main mischief is that it utterly distorts political discourse. No one knows what it is that the opposition actually said, or meant to say, and so no one can understand what has happened or to predict what might happen. We are faced with that quagmire familiar from European and Latin-American politics, where every outrage attributed to a violent opposition is suspected of being officially engineered.

After the fall of Louis Napoleon in 1871, a French policeman wrote that "all the sedition cases of the past ten years had been provoked by the police, and that without their interference these affairs would either not have occurred or would not have produced any trouble." We run a risk that those words will again be written as the epitaph of the present era.

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