

Nixon Plans Watergate Counterattack

MAY 23 1973

By Jack Anderson

President Nixon is quietly preparing to fight back against the Watergate charges.

The thrust of his counterattack isn't certain. But trusted aides are putting together evidence that subversives were conspiring to undermine the political system.

These aides, working in strict secrecy, are trying to show that the threat of subversion and violence during the 1972 campaign justified extreme counter measures.

If the President adopts the line they are preparing, the word will go out from the White House that Reds, radicals and subversives sought to bring down the system by creating political turmoil. Some of these radicals, it will be charged, infiltrated into the George McGovern campaign.

It has always been the first rule of Nixon politics, that the best defense is an offense. In private, the President has become militant about Watergate. He has told intimates that he has no intention of going back on television with a long apology for the Watergate offenses.

He indicated, instead, that he will hit back at his accusers. He will explain for the record that he can't offer detailed denials without interfer-

ing with the judicial processes and jeopardizing the rights of the accused. Then he intends to counterattack.

It is quite true that the White House was flooded with scare stories on the eve of the 1972 campaign. Most of them came from Robert Mardian, then the Justice Department's internal security chief, who worked himself into a state of political paranoia.

He began chasing subversive shadows with such a vengeance that his counter-espionage efforts took on the dimensions of a police-state operation. He bombarded his superiors with warnings of civil disorders and political disruptions. Among those who received his intelligence reports were the Watergate conspirators.

Dire Warnings

We have obtained access to some of these hush-hush reports, which White House aides are also searching for evidence for the President's counterattack. As nearly as we could determine from the dozens of documents we have examined, however, the dire warnings turned out to be highly inflated.

Typical was a Jan. 18, 1972, memo to Mardian from the chief of his Analysis and Evaluation Section, John L. Mar-

tin, reviewing "current intelligence." The "principal objective" of the "antiwar leaders," he warned ominously, was to disrupt the Republican convention and to defeat President Nixon.

"The disruption of the Republican convention represents the final phase of a three phase program designed to defeat President Nixon in the 1972 presidential election," declared the intelligence analysis.

"Phase One was the People's Grand Jury Demonstration held in Washington, D.C., on October 25, 1971. Phase Two will consist of individuals following President Nixon's campaign around the country urging his defeat.

"Phase Three consists of a plan to have 500,000 to one million people attend the Republican National Convention in an attempt to deny President Nixon the Republican Party nomination."

The convention then was scheduled to be held in San Diego, and the analysis quoted a confidential FBI source as reporting the disrupters "have secured approximately 3,000 guns (small arms of various descriptions) and are equipping several trucks with armor plating." It was a report, however, that couldn't be verified.

The convention later was moved to Miami where, according to the confidential reports, 2,082 crack paratroopers from the 82d Airborne Division were dispatched in case the police and National Guard couldn't handle the anticipated violence.

An anxious Community Relations Service task force, which was also sent to Miami to quiet tensions, "met with the commanding general of the 82d Airborne Division, explained the CRS role and indicated some of the CRS concerns if the military is deployed."

The daily crisis reports sent back to the Justice Department from both the Democratic and Republican conventions, however, showed that only a handful of agitators went to Miami with violence in mind.

Typical was this report on the eve of the GOP convention: "At present there are no major indications of problems. We have made initial contact with officials and community groups. From these initial meetings, there is an indication that there will be minimal or no involvement of minority community groups. The protesting groups intend to keep things non-violent..."

Mardian's nightmare never materialized.

© 1973, United Feature Syndicate