

Cover-Up Pervading Administration

By Jack Anderson

The Watergate cover-up apparently has become the style throughout the Nixon administration. Government auditors have been encountering "increasing difficulties" in gaining access to records of fraud, waste and mismanagement.

This is the report we get from inside the General Accounting Office, which is the investigative arm of Congress. Under the law, the GAO has a right "to examine any books, documents, papers, or records of any . . . department."

Yet obstacles have been raised, in apparent violation of this law, to hamstring GAO investigations. Comptroller General Elmer Staats confirmed to my associate, Joseph Spear, that his auditors have noticed a "distinct tightening up" of their access to documents.

As Staats puts it, government agencies have become "super cautious," thereby causing "tremendous delays" in GAO's investigations. Worst offenders: the State, Defense and Treasury departments.

State's Agency for Interna-

tional Development, for example, ordered its employees not to disclose any "recommendations or planning data" to the GAO.

Treasury's Internal Revenue Service simply refuses to let the GAO look at its books, although IRS records are made available to other agencies. "As a practical matter," Staats told Spear, "we don't see why they should cooperate with so many others and not cooperate with the GAO."

Even the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a quasi-governmental agency, has refused to open its files to the auditors. Last fall, the GAO requested some records, but CPB responded by circulating a confidential memo to its officers instructing them not to cooperate. They were told to say that the inquiries were "beyond the scope" of GAO's authority and that they, therefore, "declined to pursue the matter."

President Nixon himself set the pattern by invoking executive privilege to block the GAO from examining "internal working documents," for military assistance and foreign aid spending.

What the President once promised would be an "open" administration has become a cover-up administration.

Footnote: Staats feels the situation is so serious that he

is asking Congress for authority to take uncooperative agencies to court. If an agency should still refuse to cooperate, the GAO wants the legal right to cut off its funds.

Milk Prices

In the name of "consumer protection," the Senate Agriculture Committee has passed legislation that would raise milk prices and fatten the bank accounts of the big milk cooperatives.

Even more shocking, the language was drafted by two milk co-ops that have been accused by the Justice Department of antitrust and coercion charges.

The measure would give Associated Milk Producers, Inc. and Dairymen, Inc., together with their allies throughout America, the power to raise milk prices without serious government hindrance. It would also strike heavily at the nation's independent dairy farmers.

The two big co-ops have been charged in federal civil antitrust suits with "coercion," "threats" and attempted boycotts of other milk producers.

Yet they were able to get their friends in the Senate to slip the anti-consumer milk provision into the omnibus farm bill ironically entitled

"Agricultural and Consumer Protection Act of 1973."

The sheer size of the bill made it easy for the two co-ops to weave language, worth millions to the milk industry, into the bill. The 110 witnesses in 14 days of hearings so bewildered some senators that they left the final meeting not knowing exactly what they had voted for.

Dairy contributions of more than \$50,000 to seven committee members may also have helped mute senatorial objections.

They are Sens. Richard Clark (D-Iowa), \$7,500; Carl Curtis (R-Neb.), \$2,000; Bob Dole (R-Kan.), \$2,500; James Eastland (D-Miss.), \$15,000; Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), \$1,000; Walter Huddleston (D-Ky.), \$18,000; Hubert Humphrey (D-Minn.), \$4,100.

Consumer-minded senators, who discovered the multimillion-dollar bonanza after it had already been approved by the committee, hope to remove it from the final bill on the Senate floor. Otherwise, they fear it not only would boost milk prices but would kill any chance that the antitrust suits can be prosecuted.

Footnote: Milk importers have complained that the dairy lobby has so limited dairy imports that prices will go up anyway.