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GOP Probes Official As Teacher of 'Tricks'

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Republican National Chairman George Bush has reopened an investigation into allegations that a paid official of the GOP taught political espionage and "dirty tricks" during weekend seminars for college Republicans during 1971 and 1972. Some of the 1972 seminars were held after the Watergate break-in.

Bush said he will urge a GOP investigating committee to "get to the bottom" of charges against Karl C. Rove, 22, who was executive director of the College Republican National Committee (CRNC), an affiliate of the GOP, from June, 1971, to February, 1972.

Bush, who frequently has voiced a determination to keep the GOP free of any Watergate taint, reopened the investigation after The Washington Post drew his attention to evidence already in GOP hands. He said he was unaware of the transcript of a tape recording of Rove and a second man lecturing on campaign espionage and disruption, or of two affidavits from two Republicans who swore that they heard a similar talk.

The tape and affidavits were supplied to the Post by an anonymous caller who accused Bush's committee of "sweeping the matter under the carpet."

While executive director of the CRNC at an annual salary of $9,200, Rove organized 15 regional conferences, attended by 300 members of the College Republicans, on "the nuts and bolts of politics," and to build effective Republican organizations on college campuses across the country.

Rove told the investigating committee and a reporter that when he talked about political "pranks" by himself and others, it was always in the context of an explicit warning against the use of such tactics.

Many of the young people who went through his course, Rove said, went on to become youth directors and operatives "for a great number of Republican candidates."

He said the allegations of teaching "dirty tricks" were part of a smear campaign aimed at him by a rival College Republican faction and first raised during his bid for chairmanship of the group. "These are the kind of vicious lies that have been going on for 5½ months," he asserted.

Rove said the tape recording may be false or altered. However, Bernie Robinson, a former CRNC member from Chicago whose lecture on "dirty tricks" is recorded on the tape, said that the transcript and tape given to The Post are a "fair representation" of the talk.

A report by the committee clearing Rove of the "dirty tricks,' charges and recommending his confirmation as chairman of the CRNC was awaiting Bush's approval when The Post first approached him for information on the matter.

In a later conversation with a reporter, Bush said, "I'm a little less relaxed and more concerned than when you first brought it to our attention."

Rove's confirmation as CRNC chairman would be held up until the new investigation was complete, the Republican leader said. "I'm not discounting the allegation now," Bush explained. "It is important enough in terms of my desire to keep this place (the GOP) clean to look into this thing in further detail."

The charges against Rove were made after a bitter factional dispute split the CRNC convention in June, 1973. In five or six states where splinter groups of College Republicans split away from the national organization, two sets of delegates were sent to the convention.

After arguments over membership of the credentials committee and allegations of improper election tactics, the convention ended in confusion and dissension with the election of two rival chaimen — Rove and Robert Edgeworth.

Bush appointed the committee to investigate the election and rule on who was rightful chairman of the CRNC. The CRNC, which is housed and partially funded by the national organization, comprises more than 1,000 collegiate Republican clubs and 100,000 members.

It is unclear whether the "dirty tricks" allegations against Rove were actually investigated before Bush's personal intervention this week. Robert R. Roussek, the GOP's director of communications who sat in on some sessions of the committee, insists they were. "They talked to Karl at some length and got his evidence . . . they were completely investigated," Roussek said. "There were allegations on both sides and as much information as could be obtained was."

However, one of the committee's three members, GOP convention director Josephine Good, said the "dirty tricks" lectures happened before the convention's election and were thus outside the committee's charter. In addition, the tape and transcript were not considered, because "one of the things with tapes is that they can be doctored by editing."

Some of the people who attended the seminars denied that Rove placed any prohibitions on the use of "dirty tricks" by them.

Aubrey Mirkin, 19, an area director of the CRNC who attended a San Diego seminar in August, 1972, said of Rove's discussion of dirty tricks, "I think he was proud of them. I don't know if he was advising us, but he sure gave us a lot of ideas." She added she knew of no one actually applying the tactics.

A former CRNC leader on the West Coast, who asked not to be named because he now holds a government job, said he helped Rove run a number of the seminars and heard him give the talk on questionable election tactics between 6 and 10 times.

"I talked to him about the propriety of teaching it—of giving the effect of being something to learn and go out and do," he said.

However, Ginny Ward, chairman of the Florida Technological University Republicans in Orlando who attended the most recent seminar—at American University last week—said Rove gave no instructions on conducting dirty tricks. "It was all very much on the up and up," she said.

When asked whether she believed Rove or any of the lecturers had ever used such tactics, she replied, "I would place a lot of confidence in these individuals. I'm confident they would not lower themselves to that," Miss Ward said.

The tape given to The Post is a recording of a talk by Rove and Robinson. A transcript supplied along with the tape describes the tape as a session of the West Virginia Training School. Robinson said he believed it probably refers to a seminar held in Lexington, Ky., in August, 1972.

In the lecture, Robinson describes—with embellishing interjections from Rove—how during the 1970 Illinois campaign Rove assumed a false name and posed as a supporter to enter the campaign headquarters of Alan J. Dixon, the Democratic candidate for state treasurer that year.

Robinson told his audience that Rove took some of Dixon's campaign stationery and later used it to fake some 1,000 invitations to the opening of Dixon's campaign headquarters.

Rove, according to the tape recording of Robinson's lecture, added, "free beer, free food, girls and a good time for nothing," to the invitations and distributed them as a hippie commune, Chicago's bowery, a rock concert and soup kitchens.

Dixon, who nonetheless won the campaign, is on vacation and was unavailable for comment yesterday. However, Tom Loftus, public relations adviser to Dixon, confirmed that the incident did take place and that 1,500 people—nearly twice as many as expected—turned up at the opening of Dixon's headquarters.

"It was supposed to be embarrassing, actually it was unsuccessful," Loftus said. "If he's saying it was something to brag about, then he's conning someone. We thought it was kind of pathetic . . . inept, bumbling."

Rove admitted this week in the presence of two GOP officials that Robinson's account was basically correct.

Robinson, according to the tape recording, also told how he purloined the opposition party's garbage to help defeat Gov. Sam Shapiro, a Democrat, in the 1968 Illinois gubernatorial election.

In an anecdote that starts out, "it just so happens that the first night we struck gold," Robinson describes how he discovered in the stolen garbage evidence that one of their own supporters had contributed $5,000 to Shapiro.

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GOP Chairman George Bush pledges to "get to the bottom" of charges that "dirty tricks" were taught.

"So one of our finance guys called the guy up the next day and told him there was a vicious rumor going around . . . that not only was he giving money to both sides . . . but that they had heard he had given Shapiro more," Robinson recalled.

"The guy got all embarrassed," Robinson said, "and flew to Chicago that day with a check for $2,000" for Richard Ogilvie, the Republican candidate.

The tape and transcript contain no word or hint that such "dirty tricks" should be avoided. However, there are numerous references to the need for discretion and secrecy in such activities.

Robinson, who is now director of governmental affairs for the Illinois State Medical Society, refers to the Watergate break-in at one point. "Again, in those things, if its used surreptitiously in a campaign, its better off if you dont get caught," Robinson warned. "You know, those people who were caught by Larry O'Briens troops in Washington are a serious verification of the fact that you do get caught."

Robinson also advised his audience, "While this is all well and good as fun as games, you've really got to use your head about who knows about this kind of thing."

Robinson told a reporter that he was dismayed that the telling of what he described as "old war stories" was being construed as "an unholy alliance to enlist these people as operatives."

Robinson was unable to confirm that Rove always followed the lectures with a warning to the students not to use the tricks. However, the stories were only intended to be "stimulating, interesting, entertaining."

The two affidavits submitted to the GOP charge that Rove gave a talk on campaign espionage at a Wisconsin seminar in August, 1971. The notarized statements were submitted by George C. Rand of Cleveland and Mark S. Freedman of Chicago, both members of the College Republican group.

In the Wisconsin lecture, according to the affidavits, Rove discussed the two incidents that Robinson described in his tape-recorded lecture.