

On Cover-up Clouds Trial

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U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica said yesterday that he will demand former CIA Director Richard Helms' testimony at the Watergate cover-up trial in an effort to clear up the CIA's backstage maneuverings in the scandals.

Helms is now ambassador to Iran.

The long-simmering controversy centers on what Watergate prosecutors have called "a very strange memo" that Helms wrote 11 days after discovery of the bugging and break-in at Democratic National Committee headquarters here.

In the memo, Helms called for a tight rein on the FBI's investigations of the Watergate case.

The directive, dated June 28, 1972, was addressed to CIA Deputy Director Vernon W. Walters, and said in part that "we [the CIA] still adhere to the request that they [the FBI] restrict themselves to the personalities already arrested or directly under suspicion and that they desist from expanding this investigation into other areas which may well, eventually, run afoul of our operations."

By contrast, both Helms and Walters have repeatedly testified that they told both White House officials and former FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III that the Watergate investigation would not jeopardize any CIA activity.

The dispute over the Helms memo came up at the cover-up trial yesterday afternoon

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when Walters was called back to the witness stand for cross-examination by attorneys for former White House chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman.

Chief trial prosecutor James F. Neal objected hotly, however, to any attempts to question Walters about the document. Although the memo was addressed to him, the CIA deputy director insists that he "never saw, heard of or knew of the existence of the memo" until a year later, in June, 1973, Neal told the court.

As a result, the prosecutor said that only Helms could be properly questioned about the document, but he emphasized that the government has no intention of calling him as a prosecution witness. He said defense lawyers should be required to summon Helms if they want an explanation.

Judge Sirica indicated his agreement on that score, but made plain that he would insist on Helms' appearance at some point in the trial and that he expects the prosecutors to make sure he gets here.

"Let's get him back here and do it the right way—instead of trying to cross-examine a memorandum," Sirica said.

Told that Helms was in Iran, the judge told the prosecutors, "Well, why don't you get on the telephone and bring him back to this country... I think he'll come back here if I order him to come back."

Neal promised that "we'll bring him back," but said once again that the former CIA director's appearance should be put off until the defense begins presenting its case. Neal indicated that the prosecution has no intention of vouching for his credibility.

"Mr. Helms can bail himself out of this contradiction," the prosecutor declared. "This witness (Walters) doesn't have to do it."

The Helms memo suggests, on its face, that the then-CIA director—if not the CIA itself—was playing along with the Nixon White House's attempts to block the original Watergate investigation and prevent discovery of the Nixon campaign checks that one of the Watergate burglars had cashed. The proceeds from the checks, some of them issued through a Mexico City bank

account, were used to help finance the bugging.

According to Neal, Helms has offered Watergate prosecutors an explanation for the memo, but it is evidently one they cannot accept. "It's a bit confusing to me," Neal said.

Mr. Nixon authorized the attempt to get the CIA to block the Watergate investigation at a meeting with Haldeman on June 23, 1972. Watergate prosecutors have charged that the ploy, which held up the FBI's investigation of the telltale campaign checks for some two weeks, was part of the cover-up conspiracy.

For their part, however, Haldeman's lawyers are apparently trying to bolster suggestions that the CIA may have had something to cover up after all.

One of Haldeman's attorneys, Frank H. Strickler, began pursuing that theme as soon as Walters resumed testifying yesterday afternoon.

Strickler pointed out that Walters had stated in a July 28, 1972, memo that the CIA "had no contact whatsoever" with Watergate figure E. Howard Hunt Jr. "subsequent to Aug. 31, 1971." A former CIA agent, Hunt had prevailed on the agency for phony papers, disguises and other technical assistance in 1971 in connection with the White House-sponsored burglary at the offices of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

The CIA has said it became increasingly suspicious of Hunt's requests and cut him off shortly before the 1971 Labor Day weekend when the Ellsberg burglary was carried out.

Strickler, however, cited a CIA memo dredged up by congressional investigators that said Hunt had gone back to the agency sometime between March and May, 1972, with a fresh request, this time for "a retired lockpicker and entryman."

Under questioning by Strickler, Walters indicated that he had not been aware of this when he wrote that all contacts with Hunt had stopped the year before.

"I heard about this after the fact," he testified.

Strickler pointed out that the CIA memo about Hunt's pitch for a "lockpicker and entryman" had been written by the chief of a CIA unit identified only as the "EEAC."

"Can you tell me what those

initials are?" the Haldeman lawyer asked Walters.

"You've got me," replied the CIA's No. 2 man.

Judge Sirica ruled that he would not permit Walters to be cross-examined about "memos prepared by somebody else," and then sent the jurors back to their motel.

The finale is really one for the books. Laughlin wheels Miss Taylor into a memorial service at the school chapel. Teresa Laughlin is wheeled in at her side. Lynn Baker, another Freedom School hold-over, begins warbling something about a "golden lady who taught us love. When she breaks down, a bright-faced Negro boy breaks into the Lennon/McCartney period piece, "Give Peace a Chance." The other kids join in, clapping and raising their fists as they sing. Miss Taylor dissolves in tears, and little Miss Laughlin tries to keep pace, and the screen is positively humid with eyewash.

This absurdly lachrymose conclusion suggests a cuckoo leftwing adaptation of the "Tomorrow Belongs to Me" number from "Chance" is the inevitable who starts off all the heartfelt singing of "Give Peace a Chance" is the inevitable stereotype to replace the blond Aryan youth who started "Tomorrow Belongs to Me." Laughlin is quite oblivious to the emotional correspondences, but the links are revealing, and a little creepy to contemplate. Laughlin's point-of-view may be militantly liberal, but his artistic methods are reactionary in the extreme.