

Haldeman Rebuts Prosecution on Meaning of the Tapes

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 3—In the face of a long and openly skeptical cross-examination by the Watergate prosecution, H. R. Haldeman souht repeatedly today to rebut the inferences that the prosecution has drawn from the White House tape recordings.

The former White House chief of staff argued to the jury in the Watergate cover-up trial that there were other explanations than those the prosecution had suggested.

At times he offered his own explanations. At other times, he said he could not explain statements on the tapes but that the prosecution's explanations were wrong nevertheless.

Grows Impatient
Sometimes Mr. Haldeman told the jury and the prosecutor who was questioning him, Richard Ben-Veniste, that he could not "recall" various circumstances surrounding some of the tape-recorded conversations.

At one point he said he did not know whom he had been referring to when, in one conversation, he had said the name "John." At another point, he said of another of his tape-re-

corded remarks, "I don't know what was in my mind at the time."
Mr. Ben-Veniste listened to Mr. Haldeman's answers to his questions with increasing impatience.

Toward the end of the afternoon Mr. Haldeman rejected the prosecution's view of one of the most critical tape recordings played at the trial—one of a conversation on March 21, 1973, by Mr. Haldeman, President Nixon and John W. Dean 3d involving payments to the Watergate burglars. Mr. Haldeman did not, however, offer his own explanation.

"There is no other explanation, is there, Mr. Haldeman, isn't that the case?" Mr. Ben-Veniste demanded.
But Mr. Haldeman did not concede. With the same air of assurance and self-confidence he had shown throughout the day, he stared back coldly at the young prosecutor and replied, "That is not the case."

The impact on the jury of the day's questioning, in which Mr. Ben-Veniste confronted Mr. Haldeman with one after another segment of the White House tapes, most of them containing Mr. Haldeman's own words, was uncertain.
However, Mr. Ben-Veniste's

elicited some concessions that, along with several acknowledgments brought out in previous days, could be damaging to Mr. Haldeman's case.
The defendant conceded, for instance, that concern about "political embarrassment" had been the original reason behind the meeting in which he asked the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence on June 23, 1972, to intervene with the Federal Bureau of Investigation regarding the F.B.I.'s inquiry into the break-in six days earlier at Democratic national headquarters in the Watergate complex.

Also, Mr. Ben-Veniste had Mr. Haldeman repeat today an admission he made on Friday under direct examination by his own attorney, John J. Wilson—that he had given incorrect testimony about this June 23 meeting on several prior occasions.

Judge John J. Sirica interrupted at one point to pose his own queries to Mr. Haldeman, apparently not satisfied with the questions and answers he had been receiving. The judge's questions, like his questioning of General John N. Mitchell, one of Mr. Haldeman's four co-defendants, involved the cash

payments to the Watergate burglars.
And, as in his questioning of Mr. Mitchell, Judge Sirica did not get the information he was seeking.
"What obligation was there to pay them?" he asked.
"I have no idea," Mr. Haldeman replied.

Deeply Troubled
"Has that bothered you, troubled you?" Judge Sirica asked.
Mr. Haldeman made a slight grimace, and turned to the judge.
"Deeply, sir, in recent months," he answered.

In another development, Judge Sirica raised the possibility that written "interrogatories," or questions, might be sent to Mr. Nixon in an attempt to satisfy the wishes of Mr. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, former Presidential domestic affairs adviser who is also a defendant, for Mr. Nixon's testimony.

James F. Neal, the chief prosecutor, and attorneys for Mr. Haldeman, Mr. Ehrlichman and Mr. Mitchell all indicated to Judge Sirica that they considered interrogatories problematical and generally unsatisfactory.

Judge Sirica said, however, that he would ask the court-appointed panel of doctors who examined Mr. Nixon last week at his request whether and, if so, when Mr. Nixon might be able to answer interrogatories. The doctors reported last Friday that Mr. Nixon would not be physically able to testify in Washington at the trial until Feb. 16, and would not be able to give testimony in deposition until Jan. 6.

Judge Sirica is to rule tomorrow on a request by William

S. Frates, Mr. Ehrlichman's chief counsel, for a recess to give him an opportunity to get Mr. Nixon's deposition before the case ends.
However, the judge, some times after Mr. Frates made the motion, told the jury yesterday, "We are going to try to finish this case by Christmas."

The dispute today between Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ben-Veniste over the meaning of White House tapes had two major focuses—the events of June 23, 1972, and the payments of money to the seven men who participated in the Watergate burglary.

June 23 was the day of the Haldeman meeting with C.I.A. officials about the F.B.I. investigation of the Watergate break-in. The jury has heard three tapes of Mr. Nixon's conversations with Mr. Haldeman that day—two before the meeting with the C.I.A. officials and one after.

These are the tapes that, when released in transcript form by Mr. Nixon last August, precipitated his resignation from the Presidency.

Debated F.B.I. Inquiry
They show Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Nixon discussing the political embarrassment that could flow from a continued F.B.I. inquiry into money found in the possession of the Watergate burglars. The money, if traced all the way back, would lead to Nixon campaign contributions.

They then show Mr. Haldeman suggesting—and Mr. Nixon agreeing to directing—that the C.I.A. deputy director, Gen. Vernon A. Walters, be told to tell the acting head of the F.B.I., L. Patrick Gray 3d, that the F.B.I. inquiry could injure CIA assets in Mexico.