

The Scott Papers

The private papers of Senate Republican leader Hugh Scott reveal for the first time the agonizing that went on inside the GOP during the Watergate investigation.

The papers show that top Republican leaders had grave misgivings about President Nixon even while they continued to offer him lip service. But once they became convinced of his guilt, they would no longer support him.

Clearly, Nixon could never have remained in office, as Indira Gandhi is doing in India, by declaring a national emergency and usurping dictatorial powers. His own party leaders simply wouldn't have gone along.

Our investigation has established, for example, that former Defense Secretary Mel Laird fiercely resisted any impromptu White House pressure. He gave his assistants explicit orders, no matter who called from the White House, that they were not to comply with improper requests. They were directed to refer all calls for special favors to his office.

On March 19, 1974, the Scott papers show, Senate Republican leaders had a dramatic confrontation with Nixon's personal attorney, James St. Clair, and White House counselor Dean Burch.

"We told St. Clair," Scott confided afterward to an aide, "that our obligation was not to the President but to the truth. (There was) common agreement on need for full disclosure, on the fact that this scandal continues to harm the nation and the party."

"We said that, if the case comes to the Senate from the House, that we act as jurors and can't prejudge the evidence. At the same time, we cannot and will not shield any guilty party no matter how high it goes. Will it go that high? I know you think it will. St. Clair thinks not. It's a hell of a situation!"

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Scott provides an intimate, absorbing account of the GOP agonizing in an exchange of confidential memos with his former trusted assistant and confidant, Martin Hamberger.

As far back as the 1968 Republican convention, Scott expressed reservations about Nixon. "He has the knowledge," Scott told Hamberger. "But the question is: does he have the wisdom?" Scott continued to worry about Nixon in private, the memos show, even while defending him in public. Early in the Watergate drama, Hamberger asked his boss bluntly: "Are you sure you're getting the whole truth from these people?"

"Someone is not telling the truth," responded Scott on May 10, 1973. "Is it H and E (H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman)? Dean? Or, God forbid, higher up? I have today decided that I must not, as party leader, prejudge this horrible situation until all the facts are out."

The previous March 19, according to the memos, Scott huddled with Gerald Ford who was then the House Republican leader. "We discussed the possibility of White House involvement, and I indicated I would put it up to R.N. (Richard Nixon) at the leadership meeting at the White House the next day," related Scott.

The following morning, Scott sat down with Nixon in the Oval Office. "I told R.N. that many senators had urged me to clear up continuing

doubts, and I thought he should authorize me to state, if it was true, that no one (including himself) in the White House was involved," related Scott.

Nixon lied to his Senate leader. "No one now at the White House was involved in it," he said.

"Good," said Scott. "I'll tell the press that on my authority."

"Hell no," declared the President. "You can say it on my authority."

Commented Scott in his memo on the incident: "This is relieving. Still, somebody knows more than they're telling. . . . The truth will finally come out. Lord knows where it will lead."

After Congress reconvened the following January, Scott held an urgent meeting with House Republican leader John Rhodes and Republican National Chairman George Bush about Watergate. "All of us worried about lacking enough facts," Scott reported afterwards. ^{1/974}

He pressed for the facts at a February 1 meeting with Al Haig and St. Clair. "They don't conceal the seriousness but continue to insist that the (White House) tapes which Haig showed me last December do not make a case against R.N.," related Scott. "I asked whether there was anything else. St. Clair didn't think so."

Scott talked it over with his assistant Senate leader, Sen. Robert Griffin (R-Mich.), on March 19, 1974. "I complained to him that the White House never takes my advice. . . . Bob

thought we'd better have a go-round with our leadership and get their reactions."

Scott had recommended "full disclosure" to the White House. "I told Gerry Ford at one of our meetings what I'd said," reported Scott. "He's made the same strong recommendation to R.N. that I have. We both get the same answer: 'That's what I'm trying to do.'"

Scott went back to the White House on March 29, 1974, to recommend not only full disclosure but full cooperation with the House impeachment inquiry.

"R. N. stressed willingness to cooperate," wrote Scott, "that they had been in touch with (House Judiciary Chairman Peter) Rodino, and (ranking Republican Edward) Hutchinson, that St. Clair was working on it, that they would keep us informed."

According to the memo, Scott told Nixon to his face: "What's needed here is a strong show of moral indignation. You're in a position to say, 'Let the chips fall, let the guilty be punished.' I will not stand for wrongful conduct. I think now you'll have to say it with a great deal of emphasis."

But all Scott got out of Nixon, he wrote, was the same old answer: "We're cooperating. We're working on it."

Unless there was full cooperation, Scott stressed in a March 30, 1974, memo, "our whole leadership will have to pull away from him. . . . We're beginning to realize that we may yet be jurors."

The message of the memos—that the Republican faithful would not support the President of their own party beyond the legal bounds—is worth proclaiming during the Fourth of July holiday.

Footnote: Sen. Scott is traveling abroad and could not be reached for comment.