

H.R. HALDEMAN THE ENDS OF POWER



with Joseph DiMona

This Side of the "Smoking Gun"

NIXON: No need for that. I talked to Chuck myself. He says he's innocent. Colson tells me he never mentioned O'Brien when Hunt and Liddy were in his office. [laughs] Never mentioned it. Just talked generalities about getting their intelligence plan approved.

HALDEMAN: I'm still not convinced . . .

NIXON: So I go along with it, saying I wonder who was so crazy to go into the Democratic National Committee. You think there's a chance Colson's telling the truth?

HALDEMAN: Yes. I think Magruder would be dumping on Colson . . .

NIXON: Not if Colson used *my* name in the call. I hate things like this. We're not in control. We don't know who's lying. . . . Well, we'll just have to hang tough, no matter what. In fact, we'd better go on the attack.

And with those words, he began the discussion of public relations approaches to combat the Democratic National Committee efforts to capitalize on the break-in, on which I made the notes that survive.

2

For years Nixon had been trying to track down proof that Larry O'Brien was on Howard Hughes' payroll as a lobbyist at the same time that he was Chairman of the Democratic National Committee. This could be hot ammunition to discredit O'Brien, Nixon believed. What had O'Brien done in exchange for Hughes' money (reportedly, a huge \$180,000-a-year retainer)? A wiretap on O'Brien's telephone and a bug in his office could obtain the proof Nixon wanted.

To take such a risk as that burglary to gain that information was absurd, I thought. But on matters pertaining to Hughes,

Who Ordered the Break-in?

Which leads me to my own theory of who initiated the Watergate break-in.

Richard Nixon, himself, caused those burglars to break into O'Brien's office.

5

The fact that it was Larry O'Brien, of all people, who was leading the Democratic charge on ITT embittered Nixon. O'Brien touched a raw nerve: Nixon's dealings with Howard Hughes, which had cost him two elections.

In the case of O'Brien, Nixon was acting very much like Captain Queeg in his search for the strawberries. He *knew* the strawberries had been stolen, but he just couldn't get anyone to take the event seriously.

And here was Larry O'Brien, a secret Hughes lobbyist—and no one cared enough to dig out the *proof* about O'Brien's connection with Hughes.

And yet, as Nixon had often said to me, how the press took after him on any possible connection to Howard Hughes! He strongly felt that the build-up of the \$205,000 loan to his brother was a typical "cheap shot" by the press. Now he felt he had a scandal of his own to reveal which could turn the tables on the Democrats. He called me into his cabin in Air Force One and laid out the program. "We're going to nail O'Brien on this, one way or the other."

For assistance, I turned to Dean who turned to Caulfield who turned to jelly when he found "skeletons in the Hughes closet" (ironically both Republican and Democrat)—and quietly let the issue die. But the subject was never dropped. In 1972, as the election approached, Nixon became more heated on the subject. "O'Brien's not going to get away with it, Bob. We're going to get proof of his relationship with Hughes—and just what he's doing for the money."



Where does all this leave us? What is our conclusion? First, we must conclude that we do not yet know the whole Watergate story, and recognize that we may never know it. Many mysteries remain. Contrary to the almost unanimous public opinion at this time, the case has not been settled; it is not as simple as we might wish; and it may never be fully solved.

But at the risk of enormous oversimplification of a vastly complex case, we can try to draw some general conclusions from what we do know:

1. The Watergate break-in itself came about as a result of President Nixon telling Charles Colson to get some information regarding Larry O'Brien; of Colson assigning the job to Howard Hunt; of Hunt using Gordon Liddy and the CRP capability and resources to repeat the pattern of their earlier Ellsberg break-in.

2. The break-in effort collapsed because the Democratic Party was ready for it. They knew it was going to happen, and let it. And the CIA monitored the burglars throughout. Finally, the break-in was probably deliberately sabotaged.

3. The subsequent cover-up came about as a result of a variety of motives and concerns in the minds of a number of people.

President Nixon feared a Colson role in the break-in and suspected that John Mitchell might also be involved. He wanted to protect them. In addition, he feared the revelation of what he called "other things," including both national security matters and Colson political projects.

As Chief of Staff I followed the general path of events with no personal motivation other than the presumed wish of the President and the protection of the re-election campaign.

Ehrlichman had a special concern of his own because of the Ellsberg break-in.

Dean, anxious to promote his own career by proving he could handle anything, took advantage of this golden opportunity; although he also may have had some concern regarding his pre-knowledge of Liddy's intelligence plans.

John
so re-
ccom-
fency,
uclear
Union
Crisis

ection
verful
t pop-
ry was
his in-
prece-
Nixon,
d now.
H. R.
ations
E what
people
be the

ing ca-
n 1976
State
t legal
o York
tchell-

at Ar-
rnold

ATES

OTO

Conclusion

Colson tried to withdraw completely from the whole cover-up chain (a very unusual posture for him to take in a matter of this kind), but became involved anyway, in the message of clemency for Hunt.

Magruder tried to save first himself, and then the campaign. He knew exactly what the real dangers were right from the start.

Mitchell remained very much in the background after the early days, and was apparently as much, or more, worried about the "other things" as he was about Watergate.

The CIA's real role and motivations remain a mystery—but they were there.

The many others involved did what they were told—or what they thought was expected of them.

4. The cover-up collapsed because it was doomed from the start. Morally and legally it was the wrong thing to do—so it should have failed. Tactically, too many people knew too much. Too many foolish risks were taken. Too little judgment was used at every stage to evaluate the potential risks vs. the gains. And when the crunch came, too many people decided to save their own skins at whatever cost to the President or anyone else. Especially John Dean.

And all the while, the four major power blocs were waiting in the wings to take the fullest advantage of the sword that was being so surprisingly handed to them. The press, the bureaucracy, the Congress, and the intelligence community, all had their own reasons for seeing that the sword was wielded most effectively.

Thus, there were many players in the Watergate drama—and behind them all lurks the ever-present shadow of the President of the United States.

At least at the beginning of each phase of the Watergate cover-up, all those involved thought they were acting on behalf of the President, and for his best interest. Yet none of them had any direct instructions from the President to do any of the things they did. And most of them were capable, intelligent, dedicated, law-abiding citizens believing they were serving their country.

And the ultimate irony is that the Watergate break-in stands as the only major political scandal in history in which not one

of those
any wa
person

It is
clear e
system
proves

Had
staff sy
it wou
had ha
avoid

The
functio
events
ular p
differ
was co
sibility
for set
the W

Thi
either
what i

One
break-
always
fore al
tive d
correc
at leas

Col
paid li
potent
eral ti
Colsor

Yet
contrc