

Haldeman says secret tapes exonerate President Nixon

WASHINGTON (UPI) — H. R. Haldeman told the Senate Watergate committee Monday he has listened to tapes of some of the conversations secretly recorded in President Nixon's Oval Office and that they do not support John Dean III's claim that Nixon knew of the Watergate cover-up.

Haldeman, once so powerful in the White House that he was known as "the assistant president," said in April and again this month Nixon gave him permission to review some of the tapes.

He said he listened to what had been said about Watergate on the two dates central to Dean's charge that Nixon was aware of his administration involvement in concealing the full Watergate story from the courts and the public.

He said the tape recordings dispute Dean's account of:

— The Sept. 15, 1972 meeting, attended by Dean, Haldeman and Nixon, where Dean said Nixon congratulated him for "containing" Watergate to the seven original defendants.

— The March 21, 1973 meeting at which Dean said he warned Nixon that Watergate threatened to become "a cancer on the presidency" and that Dean, Haldeman and John Ehrlichman were all "indictable."

Haldeman went to the witness table after Ehrlichman finished his fifth and final day of testimony before the committee.

In effect, Haldeman supported the content of what Dean had testified, but disagreed sharply with Dean on interpretation.

Haldeman said Dean misconstrued what Nixon had said on Sept. 15. He said Nixon did give his counsel a pat on the

back for his handling of the Watergate matter, "which was a perfectly natural thing for him to do." But he said the President did not express interest in delaying the trial in the Democrats' potentially embarrassing civil suit against the Committee to Re-Elect the President (CRP) — as Dean testified.

As for the meeting March 21, Haldeman's version differed with Dean's on many key points. For example, he quoted Dean as telling the President that Gordon Liddy, convicted as the mastermind of the wiretapping scheme, had told him "that no one in the White House was involved."

Haldeman said Nixon authorized him to listen to the tapes and the Secret Service issued them to him. He said he listened to one tape in his office in April when he was still in the White House and to the other at his home this month — after Dean had testified. He kept it overnight, he said.

Before Haldeman went into that portion of his written statement dealing with the tapes, his lawyer, John Wilson, read a letter from White House counsel Fred Buzhardt instructing Haldeman to invoke executive privilege if asked about anything on the tapes which was said when he was absent from the discussions.

Committee Chairman Sam Ervin, Jr. (D-N.C.) grumbled about that condition — but the accepted it, for the time being. Haldeman then read about the tapes.

"The claim of executive privilege is not valid," said Ervin. "If you were permitted to hear what the tapes said, then

you can tell us what the tapes said."

When Haldeman said his notes on the tapes had been turned over to the President, Ervin said: "Oh, the President keeps the notes, and keeps the tapes."

Sen. Daniel Inouye, (D-Hawaii), said later that the incident, in his view, meant Nixon "has waived his right to the tapes."

The President has refused to honor subpoenas from the committee and Archibald Cox, special Watergate prosecutor, for the tapes, and the issue appears headed for a Supreme Court decision. Nixon said he reviewed the tapes and while they sustained his view that he was a victim of the cover-up and not its perpetuator, they were subject to misinterpretation.

Haldeman, 46, a former West Coast advertising executive, followed his long-time associate, Seattle lawyer Ehrlichman, to the witness stand. Ehrlichman ended nearly five full days there with an emotional appeal to the young people of America to shun the advice of an earlier youthful witness, Gordon Strachan.

Strachan, who served as Haldeman's liaison to the CRP, had urged the young to "stay away" from Washington. Tears filled his eyes. Haldeman urged them to come — but to be prepared to take criticism.

The crew-cut Haldeman disputed Strachan's testimony that he had instructed Strachan, on the Monday morning after the Watergate arrests of June 17, 1972, to destroy political intelligence documents in White House files. He said he recalled giving no such instructions.

According to Haldeman's version of the March 21 meeting — based on his notes taken while listening to the tape of it — the main topics had been money paid to the defendants and alleged clemency offers to them.

"The President confirmed that he could not offer clemency and Dean agreed," Haldeman said.

This contrasted with Dean's version, in which he did not mention any discussion of clemency at the March 21 meeting. Instead, Dean said he talked about clemency with the President eight days earlier. On that occasion, he said, Nixon "referred to the fact that bugging conspirator Howard Hunt had been promised executive clemency."

Haldeman said Nixon asked Dean a number of leading questions about payments to the Watergate defendants, "obviously trying to smoke out what was going on."

"He asked such things as, 'Well, this is the thing you would recommend? We ought to do this, is that right?' And he asked where the money would come from, and how it would be delivered, and so on," Haldeman said.

"He asked how much money would be involved over the years and Dean said probably \$1 million, but the problem is that it is hard to raise. The President said, 'There is no problem in raising \$1 million. We can do that, but it would be wrong.'"

UPI Roundup

Two prime ministers visit Nixon

WASHINGTON — Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, an outspoken critic of U.S. policy in Indochina, met with President Nixon for more than an hour Monday and later said he would continue to speak out when the two governments disagree. Nixon also was preparing to greet Japanese Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka on an official visit Tuesday. He had only the single informal meeting with Whitlam.

'Summer Jam' tops Woodstock

WATKINS GLEN, N.Y. — About 5,000 weary rock fans remained encamped Sunday night at a garbage strewn grand prix race course that served as an outdoor dance floor for more than 600,000 persons. However, police reported that many of the winding country roads leading out of this small Finger Lakes community still were clogged with vehicles and hitchhikers, resembling a line of refugees. Many abandoned cars were pushed onto the shoulders of roads to keep the exodus moving. Many of the travelers carried packs on their backs. Some clung to sides of trucks while others sat atop cars, looking over the jam of humanity that made the 12-hour "Summer Jam" festival surpass the Woodstock concert of 1969.

Canada pullout cripples ICCS

SAIGON — The Vietnam international peace-keeping team will come to a virtual standstill Tuesday when Canada pulls out, according to the chairman of its Hungarian delegation. Until a replacement is found, Ferenc Esztergaly said Monday, all investigations and supervision of prisoner releases by the International Commission of Control and Supervision (ICCS) will be suspended.

Astronauts' illness delays spacewalk

HOUSTON — The Skylab 2 astronauts reported Monday they were still queasy and nauseous and flight controllers ordered a second delay in the first spacewalk planned for the 59-day research voyage. Mission commander Alan Bean said he, Owen Garriott and Jack Lousma were more than a day behind schedule. He complained they were having trouble catching up because of extra work imposed on them due to minor spacecraft troubles.

Detroit gets new pollution deadlines

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Monday gave the "Big Three" auto makers until 1977 to turn out cars that will meet federal pollution standards — the second such delay granted this year. Robert Fri, acting EPA administrator, said the extension for emissions of nitrogen oxides — which he said would not pose "a significant problem" with respect to air quality — was granted the automakers because the technology would not be available for the companies to produce 1976 model cars that would meet the federal standards for nitrogen oxides. In April, the EPA granted a similar one year delay — also to 1977 — on carbon monoxide and hydrocarbon standards for 1975 model cars.

Laos accord reached

VIENTIANE, Laos (UPI) — The forces of Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma and the Communist Pathet Lao have reached tentative agreement to form a coalition government and begin withdrawal of foreign troops, a high-ranking government source said Monday. Still to be worked out are some military issues.

Under the Feb. 21 cease-fire agreement, formation of a coalition government must be completed within 30 days, followed by the 60-day withdrawal.

The latest accord provides that the present regime under Prince Souvanna and the Pathet Lao would each receive five ministries in a coalition government with non-political figures in two additional ministries, the government source said.

Souvanna, a 72-year-old neutralist, would remain as prime minister with the Pathet Lao occupying one of the two deputy premierhips, a point that has been a major obstacle to agreement on political issues in the last five months of negotiations.

The source said it appeared likely that the Pathet Lao deputy premier would be Prince Souphanouvong, Souvanna's half-brother and the nominal head of the Pathet Lao. The second deputy would likely be Leum Insisiengmay, a cabinet minister considered a leader of rightist elements in the government.

Signing of a protocol on terms of the agreement starts in motion provisions in last February's cease-fire accords for withdrawal of 16,000 U.S.-organized Thai mercenary troops, 350 American advisers and an estimated 60,000 North Vietnamese troops from the country.

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