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CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT

VIA: RON ZIEGLER

FROM: DAVID GERGEN

SUBJECT: Conversations with Bob Woodward on Watergate

Last night, after receiving an urgent call from reporter Bob Woodward that the Post was agonizing over a story that would implicate RN in a "cover-up," Len Garment and I met with him privately in my office for some 90 minutes. Eventually both the Post and the Times (which was also considering it) decided to hold the story.

At Ron Ziegler's request, I want to give you the highlights of that conversation. Garment has read this account and thinks it is accurate.

Dean story: Two highly reliable sources -- one inside and one outside the WH -- have reported that Dean is holding back a story implicating the President in the cover-up. Dean's attorney may have told the prosecutors already, but the attorney and Dean are anxious that the story not be printed. Dean is saying that he will use it only if RN does not force HRH and JE to walk the plank with him.

No specifics were given on the story, but it apparently involves a chronology of meetings with RN, HRH and JE. There is one particularly incriminating detail which he would not disclose because it would reveal a source. There is enough hard news here that, if proven, might constitute the basis of a criminal offense; at the very least its release would be extremely damaging.

The reporters believe that Dean is an honest man who wants to go straight with the story now. They further believe that after he talked

with RN on March 21 (20?), he was told to cool off and hold tight; sent to Camp David for that purpose, but he decided there that he couldn't hold back. He will now testify to everything he knows on HRH and JE, and so long as RN cuts them loose, he will claim executive privilege on his conversations with RN.

But if HRH and JE are protected, he will try to take RN down with him.

Dean has written a report recently and is holding it.

As to RN's involvement, the reporter said that all of the political pros in town believe that RN must have known about it.

The cover-up, in his opinion, involves hush money and efforts to impede the investigation.

Petersen: In arguing that an independent prosecutor was needed, he warned that a nasty story is forthcoming on Petersen. Alleges that Petersen quashed a very sensitive prosecution after having abundant evidence of guilt. Government attorneys serving as source. No indication of timing on story.

The Plumbers: He believes that this is a very vulnerable ugly operation and expects additional stories to be forthcoming beyond Ellsberg. May be working on a story about extensive bugging of the press. Also has a story about bugging of Beecher (NY Times?) during SALT talks.

Their understanding is that HRH masterminded the plumbing operation. This was cited as one of the reasons that it was believed absolutely essential for RN to cut him loose. He did not mention JE or Colson in this regard.

Wants to know why Dave Young quit three weeks ago. Was he another Rietz?

Stans: Probably the most corrupt operation of all, he said. He has evidence that Stans called some corporate heads with roughly the following line: we have assessed your net worth and believe that you should contribute 1 percent of that total amount to the reelection effort. He has one corporate head who is on the verge of breaking the story; this fellow gave and now regrets it. The point was not made explicitly, but I gathered that there were several other potential stories here.

Grand Jury: Thinks indictments are at least two weeks away, and has reports that they are very angry with the Administration -- think they were had on the earlier round.

Gray: Understands that Gray is very angry and will start lashing out at people soon.

Chotiner/Teamsters Fund: Believes there isn't much to it.

NB: Throughout the conversation, he emphasized that in their opinion it would be enormously beneficial for RN to act decisively and soon. Half-way measures, in his view, would only invite increased pressure and new revelations. If RN takes strong measures, he thinks the public would want to believe him and would rally round, and the press might well call off the dogs.

"Department of Dirty Tricks: -- While he refused to elaborate much, he pointed this out as another Administration soft spot that the press is now beginning to probe. He thinks its a continuing story that runs back to the beginning of the Administration. Among some of its efforts:

-- The Kennedy Files: They have no evidence that use was made of the Chapaquiddick file, but he alleges that phony cables from JFK were given by Hunt or Colson to Bill Lambert of Time/Life -- the same fellow who wrote the Tydings story in Life that was linked to Colson. Lambert never wrote the story. (Note that Post and Times a few hours after our discussion carried pieces of the Lambert story, essentially confirming Woodward's account.)

- Bugging of Media -- part of overall attack;
- Spying -- other activities aimed at radicals;
- Discrediting of Liberals in underhanded fashion.

NB: Colson: His information leads him to believe that Colson was involved in many of the dirty tricks and other activities above but was cunning enough not to leave any tracks. A very bright lawyer who always drew back before crossing any legal lines. He thinks Colson may come out of this entire affair with fairly clean hands.

Saturday Talk

As a follow-up to last night's conversations, I called our friend today to say that I felt compelled to pass the Dean story to the President and to ensure that Woodward would call me before the Dean story was printed. He agreed to both.

He went on to report the following:

-- Dean story implicating the President: they're not working on it for Sunday at this point, but it is "passing around town." He discounts the Times immunity story of this morning.

-- Krogh: They have one reliable source now that he is implicated in the Ellsberg case. No hard information that he knew about it before the fact but that he definitely knew about it thereafter and helped to pass along information to the Justice Department. They're trying to reach Krogh now. They also think the story may destroy the Government's case.

-- Department of Dirty Tricks: Interest in this one is accelerating. They have concluded that Hunt and Liddy became "WH burglars;" they not only broke into things but also installed a number of wiretaps "in the guise of national security." Mardian and Mitchell were both tied into it, according to their sources. Not yet sure about other WH involvement and are trying to piece together the size of the operation. "Our best sources indicate that this is the worst part of the whole WH operation; there are a lot of horror stories here which, if they trickle out, will be absolutely devastating." Thinks it would be best to get them all out at once. Quick action by RN would help, he said.

Indictments: Their information is that the indictments are still weeks away. Prosecutors don't talk to them directly but reliable word at Justice is that prosecutors feel so burned by the first round -- they didn't follow up a lot of leads, didn't ask hard questions -- that they are determined to press hard this time. If it isn't politically satisfying to their superiors, screw 'em. Their own reputations are at stake on this round.

Once again, he closed by stressing the need for speedy, decisive action. It's almost as if he's playing the role of midwife now and wants to help the process along.