

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 5 Book World

WASHINGTON POST
25 November 1984

Deep Throat, Phone Home

SECRET AGENDA

Watergate, Deep Throat and the CIA

By Jim Hougan

Random House. 347 pp. \$19.95

By Anthony Marro

MORE THAN 150 books already have been written about Watergate, and to understand the new dimension Jim Hougan hopes to add to this record with *Secret Agenda*, it is necessary to understand the official, or at least the widely accepted, version of events. Boiled to its essence, it goes something like this:

In May and June 1972, a group of men working for the Nixon reelection campaign staged two break-ins at the Democratic National Committee offices at Watergate. The group included G. Gordon Liddy, James McCord, and E. Howard Hunt. Liddy was a former FBI agent. Hunt and McCord were retired CIA officers. With the aid of some hirelings from Miami's Cuban exile community, McCord installed two wiretaps on the night of May 27-28, one of them on the phone of Lawrence O'Brien, the DNC chairman, and a second on the phone of R. Spencer Oliver, another party official.

For about two weeks, in a motel room across the street, yet another former FBI agent, Alfred C. Baldwin III, eavesdropped on the wiretapped phone conversations, and typed up summaries for McCord. These were passed along to Liddy, who had them retyped under the heading "GEMSTONE," the code name for the operation, and then gave them to Jeb Stuart Magruder and other campaign officials. Because of a technical problem, the tap on O'Brien's phone never worked. The information from the tap on Oliver's phone proved to be far more personal than political, much of it from women describing sexual escapades, performed or anticipated. Baldwin assumed he was eavesdropping on DNC secretaries, but so many of the conversations were so spicy that they gave rise, as J. Anthony Lukas wrote in *Nightmare: The Underside of the Nixon Years*, to "unconfirmed reports that the telephone was being used for some sort of call-girl service catering to Congressmen and other prominent Washingtonians."

In order to repair the wiretap on O'Brien's telephone, and also to photograph his files, a second break-in was attempted on the night of June 16-17. While inside the DNC office, surgical gloves on their hands, cameras and listening devices in their possession, McCord and the men from Miami were discovered and arrested. The trail quickly led from them to Liddy and Hunt and then to the White House.

NOTHING suggests that Nixon's political apparatus was not to blame for the break-in, or that Nixon himself didn't deserve to be run out of town on a rail. The break-ins were planned in the office of then attorney general John Mitchell, funded with money from the reelection campaign, and executed by the president's men.

But this, Hougan argues, is only part of the story. His account goes well beyond, to include a prostitution ring, heavy CIA involvement, spying on the White House as well as on the Democrats, and plots within plots, with McCord scheming at the end to sabotage his own break-in. What he offers up is not so much a totally revisionist history as a history with a significant new dimension and perspective.

It likely will take some time for Hougan's reporting to be absorbed, cross-checked, challenged and tested, and whether this proves to be an important book or simply a controversial one will depend on how well it survives the scrutiny that it is sure to receive. For what Hougan is doing here is attacking the version of Watergate that has been constructed and reinforced by journalists, prosecutors, congressional investigators and academics over more than a decade—a version which he now labels a "counterfeit history."

At bottom, his contention is this: Hunt and McCord never left the CIA. They remained under the control of the agency, with Hunt spying on the White House as well as on the Democrats.

There never was a tap placed on the telephones in the DNC offices. Instead, the conversations that were monitored by Baldwin were from the wiretap of a prostitution ring located in the nearby Columbia Plaza Apartments, some of whose customers were being steered there by a secretary in the DNC. This tap most likely had been planted by a private detective named Louis Russell, who died of a heart attack in 1973. Russell was a former FBI agent, a friend of one of the prostitutes, an employe of McCord's private security firm, and, in Hougan's view, a CIA operative tapping the calls for the agency. The connection between the prostitutes and the DNC had been arranged by a Washington attorney, Phillip Bailey, who had persuaded a secretary at the DNC to steer clients to a prostitute identified only as "Tess." Since he traveled frequently and his office was empty, the secretary and the clients had used Spencer Oliver's phone to arrange meetings with "Tess."

This secret CIA operation involving the prostitutes was so sensitive that McCord and Russell set out to sabotage the break-in at Watergate to insure that the other Watergate burglars wouldn't stumble across it. "In effect," Hougan writes, "the snake had swallowed its tail: CIA agents working under cover of Nixon's re-election committee came to be targeted against their own operation. . . . All that the agents could do was to stand tall and, when all else failed, blow their own cover." By doing this, Hougan says, the information from the wiretaps on the prostitutes would be preserved for the exclusive use of the CIA, which presumably would use it to blackmail important people, or to create psychiatric profiles of them.

Continued