



press release

THE INSTITUTE OF THE BLACK WORLD
87 Chestnut Street, S.W.
Atlanta, Georgia 30314

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WATERGATE-TYPE BREAK-IN AT IBW: CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE

Just at a time when most people had assumed that the latest series of damaging public revelations had brought Watergate-type break-ins to an embarrassed halt, the Atlanta-based Institute of the Black World was hit by a burglary that had many of the familiar elements of political undercover work about it.

Sometime during the night of March 11/12, 1975, the frame-house offices of the Institute were burglarized, a group of highly sensitive tapes was taken, file folders were removed and examined, and some 7000 dollars of office equipment was stolen. In spite of the crippling effect of the loss of typewriters, tape recorders and other office equipment, the staff of the Institute strongly suspects that the removal of these items was essentially a cover-up for the more clearly political focus of the break-in.

"The tapes were the heart of the matter," said Vincent Harding, Director of the Institute. Included on these tapes were highly sensitive discussions which had been carried on by the planning committee of the Institute just ten days before the break-in. Other tapes were available in the same room where these were located, and there were scores more in other parts of the Institute; but as far as the staff can tell, only the planning committee tapes and the tapes of several Institute staff meetings were taken.

Many persons have asked what was on the stolen tapes. In order to answer that question it must be understood that one of the major continuing functions of the five-year old Institute has been to serve as a center for the political education of the Black community in America. In keeping with that role, the Institute has recently been carrying on a broad-ranging, exploratory series of discussions of the present condition of Black people in America, their relationship to the white population, the current, continuing crisis of the entire nation's social, political and economic systems, and the relationship of all these interpenetrating elements to the larger world systems of capitalism and socialism.

In an attempt to clarify its own vision of the present situation and of the possible way ahead, the planning staff of the Institute has been formulating plans for a series of quiet intensive dialogues with persons who represent some of the major political tendencies and histories in the Black community. These plans and their implications formed the mass of the materials on the stolen tapes. In addition, the taped sessions included critical evaluations of the organization's own financial and political situation and studied assessments of its future tasks.

"We were simply carrying out the work which we believe to be our responsibility," said Harding, "but we are well aware of the ways in which government and other forces could try to use the materials against us." Meanwhile, he said, "IBW has no intention of backing away from the tasks which are so crucial for this moment in history."

Because the Institute has received some information which leads it to suspect that its own experience is not an isolated one, and that other Black, progressive organizations have also been subjected to harassment, surveillance and break-ins, it is actively seeking information concerning such developments. It has sent a message to the Congressional Black Caucus, calling for a broad-scaled inquiry into these