

Carter, Aide Deny Helms Gained 'Badge of Honor'

By Charles R. Babcock
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President Carter and his administration's top criminal prosecutor yesterday rejected the claim that former CIA director Richard M. Helms could wear his recent conviction for failing to testify fully before Congress as a "badge of honor."

Helms was fined \$2,000 and given a suspended jail term last week after pleading "no contest"—technically the same as guilty—to two misdemeanor charges stemming from his failure to tell a Senate committee about covert CIA operations in Chile.

Edward Bennet Williams, Helms' lawyer, told the sentencing judge that his client would bear "the scar of conviction for the rest of his days." But afterward both he and Helms told reporters the conviction was a "badge of honor."

Asked about this yesterday at his press conference, President Carter said, "No, it is not a badge of honor and a public official does not have a right to lie."

He added that he felt the plea bargain arrangement in the Helms case was the "right decision" and the best decision. It does not condone lying. It does uphold the law. And I think it did protect, as best we could, the security of our country."

At an earlier breakfast with reporters, Benjamin R. Civiletti, the head

of the Justice Department's Criminal Division who negotiated the deal with Helms' attorney, said he thought the public was used to defendants' proclaiming their innocence after a conviction. "So I don't think people are going to swallow self-interest statements," he said.

Civiletti added that he considered those post-sentencing comments "excessive." While Helms had seemed contrite before sentencing, he said, "I think some of the language by the judge stung Mr. Williams particularly. And in the flush of the proceedings he overextended himself perhaps . . . and Mr. Helms picked up on the theme."

Civiletti also labeled as "nonsense" published criticism of the plea bargain as a "slap on the wrist to a big shot." He said the first prosecution of a top intelligence official proved "nobody is free from prosecution."

On another topic, Civiletti said the Justice Department has heard nothing but "noise" from the South Korean government about any agreement to allow accused secret agent Tongsun Park to be questioned by federal prosecutors.

He said the department was willing to give Park immunity from prosecution in return for his truthful testimony about cash payments he made to members of Congress. Park also would have to be willing to tes-



BENJAMIN R. CIVILETTI

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tify personally at any future trials stemming from the criminal investigation of South Korean influence buying in Congress, he added.

Civiletti attributed the Korean government's reluctance so far to cooperate to concerns about appearing to be "on bended knee to big brother [the U.S.]" and to fears that "if he [Park] comes back and tells the truth about his activities in the U.S. it [the scandal] will just get worse."