

PARTING SHOTS

Life 1-14-72

Some off-bench opinions from Judge Julius Hoffman

"Retiring?" snaps the feisty little man in the black robes. "I'm not retiring! I'm just going to lighten my burden a little bit."

At 76, Julius J. Hoffman, the federal district judge who presided over the celebrated Chicago Seven conspiracy trial, has petitioned to be placed on senior status. It is a kind of semiretirement that will eventually allow him to slow down to part-time work.

"I could have retired six years ago," he snorts, "at full pay—\$40,000. My doctor tells me, 'You are in as good shape as a man of your age can be—but don't wait until they carry you out.'"

Judge Hoffman emerged from the 1969-70 trial as controversial and well-known as any of its defendants or lawyers, but he has adamantly refused to play the role of public figure. "I have never appeared on television—and I could have made a lot of money, by the way. I never thought it would be worth that kind of money. I've never taken ten cents for a lecture, although there are judges—some think with propriety—who have accepted honorariums. The president of one of these lecture agencies offered me \$5,000 a lecture—less 20%. I think—and I had a right to

turn down any engagement I wanted to. This was when I was really 'hot.' I'm not too bad a public speaker and I write well, but this is—well, it's making money out of your profession, but it's not making money professionally."

Bound not to discuss the content citations arising from the Chicago Seven trial since they are on appeal, the judge still finds it astonishing that the case became so important. "It started as a simple two-count indictment and you know what it blossomed into. Things that developed during the trial, the breaking down of order in the courtroom, made the trial important, not the substance. Some people think it was all done for good box office."

"I could have declared a mis-trial, imposed a short sentence on those guilty of contumacious conduct and relieved myself of a four-and-a-half-month burden the like of which no judge ever endured. But I said to them: 'You want to do it your way? All right, we'll do it right down to the end.' If the contempt sentences are upheld, lawyers will think twice before doing that again. The case is now in the Court of Appeals, Seventh Circuit, seven flights upstairs. Walk on

up there and see how it's going.

"What would you say if I told you I had 32,500 letters from virtually all the English-speaking countries of the world, some of them written on what I call penny stationery. Ninety-eight and a half percent of them are complimentary. That trial ended two years ago this February, and I still get scads of Christmas cards from strangers. Women I don't know come up to me at parties and fling their arms around me. At wedding receptions people still stand in line to shake my hand instead of the bride and groom's."

"I'm a sophisticated guy, but I heard language in that courtroom I'd never heard anywhere in any company of men. They called me six different kinds of pig, and finally that was enough. There was precedent for shackling [defendant Bobby] Seale. I don't do anything without authority. I used to teach in law school."

"They didn't accomplish their objective, which was to break up the trial. If I had to do it over again, I'd do exactly the same. They got a fair trial. They went free on the conspiracy charges. If they'd behaved themselves they might have gone free altogether."

"People still come to this court as though they were visiting the zoo—to see what I'm like. I don't think I've ever had anything other than the friendship of the press, but when this case assumed the



Judge Hoffman in Chicago chambers

aspect of a political trial, then it became more fun to raise hell with me than to say, 'What a nice little guy you are.' I complained to a publisher at a party once and he said, 'You're better copy when we knock hell out of you.'

"Here I'm telling you all this and for all I know you're a subversive. You might even be Abbie Hoffman's cousin. Are you going to be fair? If you slug me, next time I see you I'll put you over my knee. And don't write 'Judge Julius Hoffman comma 76 comma.' They always do that in every story. What does age matter?"

BETTY DUNN