

# Bittman quizzed on legal fees

*F Post 12-7-74*

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica, inquiring about the payments of thousands of dollars to the Watergate burglars and their lawyers, asked one of those attorneys Friday, "When was the last time you went to a telephone booth and got \$25,000 in cash?"

"That was the only time, your honor," replied William O. Bittman, former attorney for E. Howard Hunt Jr., one of the Watergate break-in defendants.

The exchange took place with the Watergate cover-up trial jury out of the room. But Sirica later ordered Bittman brought back to be questioned with the jury present.

Sirica himself called Bittman as a witness after the prosecution and defense would not vouch for his credibility.

Former White House and Nixon campaign aides John D. Ehrlichman, H. R. Haldeman, John N. Mitchell, Kenneth W. Parkinson and Robert C. Mardian are charged with conspiring to obstruct the investigation of the Watergate break-in.

Part of the alleged conspiracy was the payment of thousand of dollars to the break-in defendants and their attorneys.

The government claims the money was paid to keep the defendants from telling all they know.

The cover-up defendants contend the money was a legitimate legal defense fund.

Bittman said that as Hunt's lawyer he received \$156,000 — \$46,000 in cash — in attorney's fees during the eight months he represented Hunt. Bittman said all the money was turned over to the Washington law firm of Hogan and Hartson in which he was a partner.

Bittman said he received a \$1,000 cash retainer from Hunt and his wife on July 3, 1972, less than three weeks after the Watergate break-in.

Four days later Bittman said he received a telephone call and was told to pick up an envelope in a telephone booth in the lobby of the building where his law office was located.

The envelope contained \$25,000 in cash.

Bittman went on to describe all of the money he received for legal fees saying \$110,000 came from an insurance payment Hunt received when his wife was killed in a plane crash.

"Mr. Hunt never stated to me on any

occasion that he was remaining silent in exchange for the legal fees," the attorney said.

Sirica, who has questioned other witnesses out of the presence of the jury about the payments, then turned to Bittman and asked, "What was done for all that money? You pleaded him guilty, didn't you?"

Bittman said that he and other attorneys in the firm spent more than 2,500 hours on Hunt's case and that his client didn't decide to plead guilty until shortly before his trial in January 1973.

Sirica, who presided over that trial, and who was a partner in Hogan and Hartson before being named a judge in 1956, asked Bittman whether getting a payment in a telephone booth didn't arouse his suspicions.

Bittman said he discussed it with other lawyers in the firm and "we were all concerned about it."

"Why didn't you do something about it?" the judge asked.

"In retrospect, I wish we had," replied the lawyer.