

The Hearings Resume—Shakily

Off to a faltering start after a seven-week recess, the resumed Watergate hearings presented no startling new evidence of outrageous conduct in the 1972 presidential campaign. But, through two witnesses whose personalities, perspectives and fortunes offered a fascinating contrast, they did provide an intriguing dialogue on political ethics. The two:

► E. Howard Hunt, 54, a career Government spy and mystery novelist, now imprisoned for the Watergate wiretapping and burglary. Graceful of language but wan and dispirited, he argued that not even the political raid on Democratic National Headquarters was improper since he believed it to have been authorized by high officials of government; ever loyal, he was merely doing his clandestine duty.

► Patrick J. Buchanan, 34, speechwriter and Special Consultant to Pres-

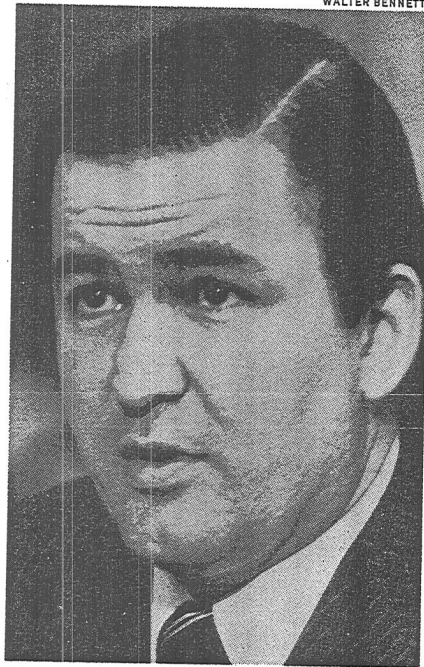
idential Judge John J. Sirica. Apparently unable to follow much of the committee testimony while in prison, he often seemed to know less about the origins of the Watergate wiretapping than any attentive TV follower of Senator Sam Ervin's committee.

Hunt complained mournfully about the injustice of his predicament. "I have been incarcerated for six months," he protested. "For a time I was in solitary confinement. I have been physically attacked and robbed in jail. I have been transferred from place to place, manacled and chained, hand and foot. I am isolated from my four motherless children.* I am faced with an enormous financial burden. I am crushed by the failure of my Government to protect me and my family as it has always done for its clandestine agents."

Hunt's testimony, however, indicated that for a time he had not been abandoned at all by the higher officials who had got him into his trouble. He admitted having paid his former attorney, William Bittman, \$156,000 in legal fees, mostly out of funds received from secret sources. Other committee testimony indicated that the funds were raised by Herbert Kalmbach, Nixon's personal attorney. Strangely, none of the Senators, all of whom are lawyers, asked Hunt why Bittman should get such a huge fee in a case in which his client merely pleaded guilty.

No Misgivings. Much of the questioning centered on Hunt's relationship with his original White House sponsor and boss, former Special Counsel Charles W. Colson. Hunt contended that his memory had been refreshed in private questioning by the committee staff and so he could now testify that in January 1972, Colson had indicated an awareness of the political intelligence plan that led to the Watergate break-in. Hunt, however, claimed that the Watergate target was not then a part of the plan. Yet Dean, Magruder and Mitchell had all testified that it had been in the scheme presented by convicted Wiretapper G. Gordon Liddy almost from its inception—testimony Hunt apparently had not heard or did not believe.

Defending the Watergate operation as legal because of its high official sanction and as a matter of national security, Hunt expressed no ethical misgivings about his other admitted acts. He said he had helped direct the burglary of Los Angeles Psychiatrist Dr. Lewis Fielding's office as part of a Colson-



WALTER BENNETT

NIXON AIDE PATRICK BUCHANAN
The ethics were elastic.

ident Nixon, who is accused of no wrongdoing at all. Sharp-tongued and aggressive, he lectured the Senators on the prevalence of "hardball" practices in politics, belligerently declining to deplore all but the most blatantly unethical acts.

As the opening witness, Hunt freely admitted carrying out what he described as "seamy activities" for the White House, but he was treated sympathetically by the committee. Far from the swashbuckling character suggested by his wartime OSS and covert CIA exploits, he was a pathetic figure. Thinned by the effects of a stroke suffered in prison, he tired visibly under questioning. He is battling in court to void his guilty plea or, failing that, to get a reduction in his

*Hunt's wife Dorothy was killed last December in the crash of a United Air Lines jet approaching the Chicago-Midway Airport. She was carrying \$10,000 in \$100 bills. Last week the National Transportation Safety Board formally rejected allegations of sabotage in the accident, blaming it on errors by the pilot and other cockpit personnel.

approved plan to discredit Daniel Ellsberg in the press. He showed no regrets at having fabricated State Department cables to link the Kennedy Administration with the assassination of South Viet Nam's Ngo Dinh Diem. He did so, he said, on instructions from Colson. The aim was to show "that a Catholic U.S. Administration had, in fact, conspired in the assassination of a Catholic chief of state in another country."

No matter how partisanly political such acts might be, Hunt seemed to consider them as routine in the life of the professional spy and beyond doubting. Said he: "My 26-year-record of service to this country predisposed me to accept orders and instructions without question and without debate."

The feisty Buchanan took refreshing exception to the litany of Hunt and oth-

Buchanan attacked the committee staff for conducting a "covert campaign of vilification" against him by leaking derogatory information to the press before his appearance. Chief Committee Counsel Sam Dash, Chairman Ervin and others quickly deplored such leaks but professed an inability to check them. Confronted by the staff with some 34 memos he had written, Buchanan protested brightly: "I don't think I need a counsel; I need a librarian more."

Promptly demonstrating that he needed neither, Buchanan turned back all suggestions that his memos advocated anything illegal or improper in politics. While readily agreeing that Democratic improprieties do not justify Republican misdeeds ("*Tu quoque* is the weakest of all arguments"), Buchanan took every opportunity to cite political tactics by Democrats that he considered worse than anything Republicans had done. What could be worse, he suggested, than George McGovern's comparing Nixon with Adolf Hitler and U.S. war policy in Southeast Asia with Hitler's extermination of Jews.* But what kind of political activity did he advocate? "Anything that was not considered immoral, unethical, illegal—or unprecedented in

to "sabotage" Democratic campaigns were, in reality, mere pranks.

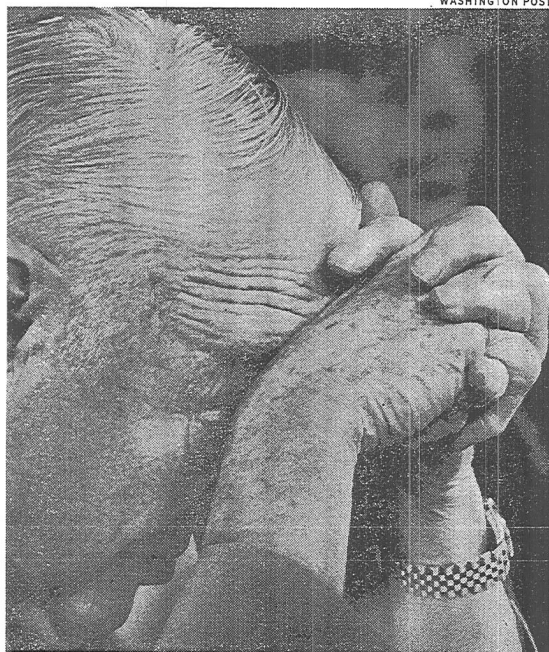
Buchanan readily termed the Watergate wiretapping "wrong" and "a crime." He found the distribution of a pamphlet during the Florida primary, charging Senators Hubert Humphrey and Henry Jackson with sexual misconduct, to be an act that "crosses the line" into impropriety; he viewed electronic surveillance in politics as wrong (it is also a crime); and he considered the diversion of campaign contributions given for one candidate to the campaign of another to be illegal.

No Judgment. Buchanan termed it routine for one party to try to influence the outcome of another party's primary elections so as to be able to run against the opponent's weakest candidate. He stoutly defended his memos urging that Nixon campaign efforts be directed at deflating Muskie since he considered Muskie far tougher for Nixon to defeat than McGovern would be. But Buchanan insisted that none of the anti-Muskie efforts were improper or illegal. He denied urging infiltration of the Muskie campaign. Buchanan said that he would never serve as such a spy himself, since that would involve deceiving someone for whom he pretended to be working, but, he added: "I would not want to sit in judgment of the ethics of others."

The committee failed dimly in trying to pin down this elastic concept of political ethics. Buchanan admitted editing a pamphlet that he agreed had grossly misrepresented Muskie's position on why it would be impractical to run a black as Vice President in 1972. His glib explanation: "This is exaggerated, hyperbolic, political rhetoric."

With Buchanan's testimony, the Ervin hearings moved into their examination of dirty political tricks. But the manner in which he verbally manhandled the Senators discouraged some staff members, who feel that this phase may not prove fruitful. "We could close up shop and write our report right now," declared one staff member. Yet, whether the hearings are televised or not, to end them after

exploring only the Watergate crisis would amount to a committee cop-out. Just because the witnesses get tough or the evidence might touch on the Senators' own political practices and both political parties, is no reason for the committee to ignore its Senate mandate. It is in the fuzzy and complex area of shady campaign practices and in the scandalous system of campaign contributions that remedial legislation is most urgently needed. There are, after all, plenty of effective laws against burglary, wiretapping and obstruction of justice—as many former Nixon associates are all too personally discovering.

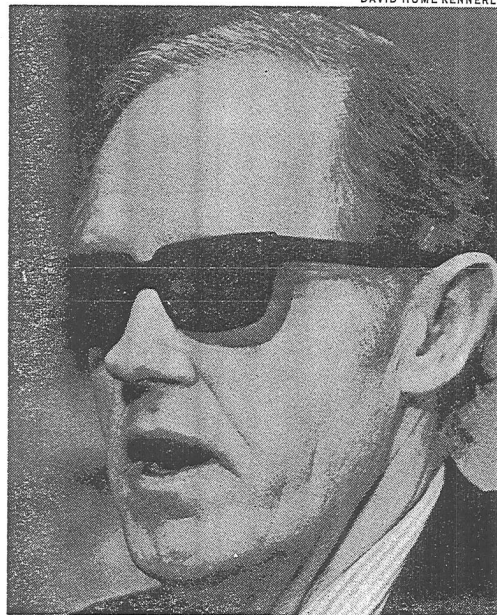


WASHINGTON POST

ERVIN LISTENING TO BUCHANAN

er Watergate figures that a man cannot be condemned for following orders. Snapped Buchanan: "Men are responsible for what they do." Born in Washington, D.C., and educated at Georgetown and Columbia (M.S. in Journalism) universities, Buchanan is proudly conservative and unabashedly bright. Except for one newspaper job—as editorial writer for the St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*—his career has been spent as one of the most loyal of Nixon's aides. He writes speeches for Nixon, supervises his daily news summary, prepares the President for press conferences. He is probably most valued for his imaginative political advice and Agnew-style rhetoric (he has also written some of the Vice President's bluntest speeches).

Quick-witted and fast-talking, Buchanan took the offensive from the moment he assailed the committee in his opening statement until the Senators excused him with relief more than five hours later. He was easily the Administration's most effective witness to date.



DAVID HUME KENNERLY

WITNESS E. HOWARD HUNT
Wan and dispirited.

previous Democratic campaigns," Buchanan replied to sympathetic caucus-room laughter.

Buchanan suggested that campaign tactics could be put into four tidy categories: "Utterly outrageous, dirty tricks, political hardball and pranks." Not pressed to define them, he cultivated the impression, as had other Watergate witnesses, that most of what have been reported as Republican attempts

*McGovern had said that Watergate-style wiretapping was "the kind of thing that you expect from a person like Hitler" and that "except for Adolf Hitler's extermination of the Jewish people, the American bombardment of defenseless peasants in Indochina is the most barbaric act of modern time."