

Ex-Hoffa prosecutor in cover-up hot water

By William J. Eaton
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WASHINGTON — A former hotshot prosecutor who obtained convictions of James R. Hoffa and Bobby Baker is in trouble with the law himself.

He is William O. Bittman, ex-lawyer for Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt and himself an unindicted co-conspirator in the Watergate cover-up case.

Bittman's problem is that he has produced a memo from Hunt that Bittman earlier said under oath he never received from his client.

THAT MEMO, described as a "bombshell" by special prosecutor James F. Neal, is going to be introduced as evidence at the cover-up trial.

It outlines in clear terms that Hunt and others expected cash and pardons from the Nixon administration to keep their mouths shut about high officials who ordered the break-in and bugging of Democratic headquarters.

Hunt testified last week that

he delivered the memo to Bittman shortly after writing it on Nov. 14, 1972, about a week after President Nixon's landslide re-election victory.

Hunt said Bittman told him he read the message over the telephone to Kenneth W. Parkinson, then a lawyer for the Nixon campaign and now a defendant on trial for the alleged cover-up plot.

AS NEAL related the events in Judge John J. Sirica's U.S. District courtroom, Bittman told the prosecutors in 1973 that he was not aware that payments to Hunt were intended as "hush money."

Neal said Bittman, an old friend from their days as federal prosecutors of Hoffa, concealed the existence of the memo from a federal grand jury.

Bittman now says he never read the Hunt memo of November, 1972, until April, 1973, according to Neal's account.

Jacob Stein, attorney for Parkinson, termed Bittman's

actions "a cover-up within a cover-up."

BITTMAN, 43, prosecuted Hoffa and won a conviction in 1964 on charges of mail fraud in connection with the Teamsters' pension fund. As a result, Bittman was named one of Chicago's outstanding young men that year.

Two years later, Bittman obtained a conviction in the tax evasion trial of former Senate aide Robert G. (Bobby) Baker. He got a special merit award from the Justice Department after that case was over.

After leaving the government, Bittman became a partner in the Washington firm of Hogan and Hartson before he left under strained circumstances after the Watergate disclosures that he received \$25,000 in cash through an unknown intermediary for Hunt's legal fees.

Bittman, father of seven, was graduated from De Paul University Law School in 1959. He went to Marquette University in Milwaukee for undergraduate education.