

'I Want to See This Guy Hung ...'

Colson Taped Hunt's Views on Ellsberg

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Former Special White House counsel Charles W. Colson told Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr. that "the resources are there" to make the Pentagon Papers prosecution "into a major public case against (Daniel) Ellsberg and co-conspirators" during a telephone conversation Colson recorded on July 1, 1971.

According to a transcript of the telephone conversation that was obtained by the Senate select Watergate committee, Colson told Hunt, "... this case won't be tried in the court, it will be tried in the newspapers."

In the conversation, Colson sounded out Hunt on the possibility of "nailing" Ellsberg in an effort to discredit him publicly for his role in releasing the Pentagon Papers. "I want to see the guy hung if it can be done to the advantage of the administration," Hunt told Colson.

"I think it can be done," Colson replied, "I think there are ways to do it and I don't think this guy is operating alone."

Hunt subsequently was hired by the White House, on Colson's recommendation, purportedly to work on declassifying the Pentagon Papers. Hunt has admitted participating in the September, 1971, break-in at the Los Angeles offices of Ellsberg's psychiatrist in an effort to obtain information about Ellsberg.

A Los Angeles grand jury has indicted former top Presidential domestic adviser John D. Ehrlichman along with former White House aides David R. Young, Egil M. (Bud) Krogh Jr. and G. Gordon Liddy on charges of conspiracy and burglary in connection with the break-in. Liddy was convicted last January in connection with the break-in at the Democratic National Committee's Watergate headquarters. Krogh, Ehrlichman and Young have pleaded innocent; Liddy has yet to enter a plea.



E. HOWARD HUNT



CHARLES W. COLSON

The transcript of the telephone conversation between Colson and Hunt is accompanied by a cover memo dated July 2, 1971, from Colson to then White House chief of staff H. R. Haldeman.

"The more I think about Howard Hunt's background, politics, disposition and experience," Colson wrote in the memo, "the more I think it would be worth your time to meet him . . . If you want to get a feel of his attitude, I transcribed a conversation with him yesterday on it. Needless to say, I did not even approach what we had been talking about, but merely sounded out his own ideas."

In the telephone conversation, Colson told Hunt that he wanted to talk about the Ellsberg prosecution. "One question that occurs to me," Colson said. "This thing could go one of two ways. Ellsberg could be turned into a martyr

of the new left—he probably will be anyway—or it could be another Alger Hiss case, where the guy is exposed, other people were operating with him, and this may be the way to really carry it out. We might be able to put this bastard into a helluva situation and discredit the new left."

After discussing how newspapers would approach the story, the following interchange occurred between Colson and Hunt:

Colson: Let me ask you this, Howard, this question. Do you think with the right resources employed that this thing could be turned into a major public case against Ellsberg and coconspirators?

Hunt: Yes, I do, but you've established a qualification here that I don't know whether it can be met.

Colson: What's that?

Hunt: Well, with the proper resources.

Colson: Well, I think the resources are there.

Hunt: Well, I would say so absolutely.

Colson: Then your answer would be we should go down the line to nail the guy cold?

Hunt: Go down the line to nail the guy cold, yes.

At another point in the conversation, Colson told Hunt, "The profit to us in nailing any son of a bitch who would steal a secret document of the government and publish it or would conspire to steal it . . ."

"Or aid and assist in its . . ." Hunt interrupted.

"And that the case now can be made on that grounds where I don't see that we could lose," Colson continued.

"It has to be made on criminal grounds and . . ." Hunt said.

"It also has to be this case won't be tried in the court," Colson said, "it will be tried in the newspapers."

The charges against Ellsberg and codefendant Anthony J. Russo were dismissed last May U.S. District Judge W. Matt Byrne Jr. following disclosure of the break-in at the offices of Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

Colson has denied that he had any prior knowledge of the Ellsberg break-in. Colson, whose name was mentioned frequently during the first

three months of hearings by the Senate select Watergate committee, is scheduled to be the first witness when the committee resumes its hearings around Sept. 18.

He is expected to be questioned about the Ellsberg break-in as well as several other activities in which he was involved while serving in the White House as special counsel to President Nixon from 1969 until he left to resume private law practice early this year.

Asked in a telephone interview yesterday what he meant by "resources," Colson said, "I really don't know what I had in mind . . . There's no way that I can dissect line by line a conversation that took place two years ago."

Colson said his conversation with Hunt "was an interview that took place to see how interested he was in coming to work" in the White House. The conversation was recorded, Colson said, so that Haldeman would have an idea of Hunt's thinking.

Asked what he meant in his memo to Haldeman by the statement, "Needless to say, I did not even approach what we had been talking about, but merely sounded out his own ideas," Colson explained, "I wouldn't be presumptuous enough to discuss hiring someone without clearing first with Haldeman and John Ehrlichman."

Colson said that other memos make clear that the conversation with Hunt was part of an interviewing process. Colson said that "five or six" persons were interviewed, that he talked to three but that only Hunt was hired.

Colson acknowledged that he knew of the White House special investigations unit—popularly known as the "plumbers"—to which Hunt and Liddy were assigned after Hunt came to work at the White House. When he spoke to Hunt on July 1, Colson said, he had in mind a job for Hunt as liaison to congressional committees and other government agencies involved in investigating the Pentagon Papers controversy.

"Hunt was hired for a job in the White House which was coordinating a public effort," Colson said. "The interview

with Hunt had nothing to do with the plumbers in any way, shape or form because when Hunt was hired, I didn't know that there was going to be a plumbers."

A memo to Ehrlichman from Krogh and Young in August, 1971, recommended that a "covert operation be undertaken to examine all the medical files still held by Ellsberg's psychoanalyst covering the two-year period in which he was undergoing analysis."

Ehrlichman initialed his approval with the notation "if done under your assurance that it is not traceable."

Ehrlichman insisted in his testimony before the committee that the break-in—which he denied approving—was a legitimate undertaking under the President's "inherent" powers to protect the national security. However, one member of the committee, Sen. Lowell P. Weicker Jr. (R-Conn.) charged that the break-in was part of a campaign by the White House to "smear" Ellsberg in the press.

During the conversation between Hunt and Colson, Colson asked Hunt, who helped plan the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion while working for the CIA: "Weren't you the guy who told me . . . that if the truth ever came out about Kennedy and the Bay of Pigs, that it would just destroy them?"

"Yea," Hunt replied, "I've written my memoris of that, but, of course, I never published them. I've just been holding them for the edification of my heirs and assigns and possibly some university research institute eventually after I . . ."

"Might want to talk to you about that Howard," Colson broke in, "I'll be back to you."

Hunt's book on the Bay of Pigs operation, "Give Us This Day: A Political Testament," is sharply critical of President John F. Kennedy for not providing air cover for the invasion. The book does not make any substantial new charges about President Kennedy's role in the invasion.