

# Colson Denies Involvement, Sees Dean-Led 'Conspiracy'

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Former White House official Charles W. Colson again denied yesterday any involvement in the Watergate break-in and cover-up and said that President Nixon's current problem over the affair stems from "a conspiracy" led by John W. Dean III "to hide information from the President."

Appearing on "The Today Show" on NBC-TV yesterday, Colson specifically denied several charges raised against him Monday by Dean in testimony before the Senate select Watergate committee, Colson said he:

- Never discussed executive clemency for E. Howard Hunt Jr. "with the President or with anyone else," contrary to what Dean had said. Hunt, who pleaded guilty at the January trial, was one of the seven convicted Watergate conspirators.

- Learned in November that money was being paid by the Committee for the Re-election of the President "for the defense of" the Watergate defendants, but he denied knowing at the time that the money was for the purpose of buying the defendants' silence.

- Did not, "to the best of my recollection," ever propose a plan to fire bomb and burglarize the Brookings Institution, as had been alleged by Dean in his testimony Monday.

Colson, former special counsel to the President, ac-



CHARLES W. COLSON

... a betrayal

knowledged that in early January of this year he learned that Hunt was making demands for money and

that he tape recorded one such telephone conversation with Hunt. Colson said yesterday that he turned the tape over to Dean and told him "he'd better get to the bottom of it, he'd better find out what was going on."

Instead of Dean investigating the matter, Colson said, "I've learned for the first time yesterday (Monday) that he (Dean) took the tape and played it" for White House aides John D. Ehrlichman and H. R. Haldeman and former Attorney General John N. Mitchell. (Dean's testimony implicated all of these men in the Watergate affair or cover-up.)

That, Colson said, "isn't really getting to the bottom of it; it isn't exactly the reason I sent him the tape."

Colson said this was typical of what Dean had done in an effort to cover up his own and others' involvement in the Watergate affair.

"What John Dean's testimony does," Colson said, "is to implicate himself, perhaps implicate other aides around the President, but... portray a story, when you read it in its full context, of a betrayal of the President, a betrayal that they didn't tell the President the truth."

Colson in recent weeks has emerged as one of the President's leading public defenders. He reportedly has met periodically with Mr. Nixon to discuss the Watergate case.