

NYT 2/11/73

Watergate Conviction

The conviction of two of the senior officials in President Nixon's campaign organization for criminal conspiracy, burglary and wiretapping of the Democratic National Committee's Watergate headquarters proves that this sinister operation was no trivial escapade by unimportant persons. It was part of a larger, far-flung, well-financed plan to use political espionage and sabotage techniques to disrupt and defeat the political opposition. The intrusion of these police state methods into domestic politics is without precedent and deserves the most thoroughgoing exposure and condemnation.

The White House has dissembled again and again in a frantic effort to divert the searchlight of public suspicion from its own responsibility for this ugly business. But thanks to the courage and tenacity of Chief Judge John J. Sirica of the United States District Court who presided at the Watergate trial, the public now has on record sworn testimony that former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, the President's campaign manager, and former Secretary of Commerce Maurice H. Stans, his chief money-raiser, personally approved the disbursement of \$199,000 to one of the convicted defendants to carry out this espionage. Judge Sirica elicited that testimony from Hugh W. Sloan Jr., the former treasurer of the Committee for the Re-election of the President, after the prosecutor in the case had unconscionably failed to do so.

Mr. Sloan also testified that one of the convicted defendants told him after the police made the Watergate arrests: "My boys got caught last night. I made a mistake by using somebody from here, which I told them I would never do."

That testimony was not contradicted, but neither did Mr. Sloan explain who was meant by "them." It is a fair deduction that senior White House aides as well as Herbert W. Kalmbach, the President's personal lawyer, not only had knowledge of this repulsive operation but also planned it, recruited agents for it, and received their reports.

Dwight L. Chapin, President Nixon's appointments secretary, has been forced to resign because he has been publicly identified as the White House contact for one of the agents. But no one who knows the amiable and loyal Mr. Chapin believes that this young man is more than the "fall guy" for others more senior than himself in the White House apparatus who are still in office.

"All the facts have not been developed by either side," Judge Sirica observed last week to the lawyers for the prosecution and the defense. The indictments were drawn as narrowly as possible, and the Justice Department has been less than ardent in exploring the case.

It is clearly the duty of the Senate to go forward with its inquiry and make an unremitting effort to identify all of the higher-ups and all of the ramifications of this ruthless conspiracy to subvert the normal exercise of political freedom.