

BMLT  
Sun

1/16/73

# Sirica wields a firm hand over the Watergate trial

Washington Bureau of The Sun

Washington—The stern faces of Moses, Solon, Hammurabi, Justinian and Judge John J. Sirica look down on the men charged with taking part in a bizarre, pre-dawn raid on Democratic national headquarters at the Watergate during the 1972 campaign.

Judge Sirica, whose severe expression resembles that of the marble statues behind him, was once dubbed "the hanging judge" by a defendant horrified to hear the judge had been assigned to handle his tax evasion case.

And in his conduct of the politically sensitive Watergate case, the 68-year-old judge has so far done nothing to damage

his reputation for stubbornness and toughness.

In pre-trial hearings, Judge Sirica ordered a newsman jailed for contempt of court on his refusal to surrender to the court tapes containing potential evidence in the case. The newsman spent three hours in jail before being released by the United States Court of Appeals.

### Defendants jailed

During the six days of the trial so far, Judge Sirica has jailed five defendants, who pleaded guilty to all charges until they could each raise \$100,000 bond. Four still are in jail and presumably will remain there until their pre-sentencing investigation is com-

pleted, unless they can raise the money to get out.

The judge is a short, stocky man with a profile reminiscent of a hatchet and a cold eye.

His uncompromising courtroom manner is that of a Victorian patriarch.

"Stay on an even keel and keep your blood pressure down," he told a defense lawyer who got carried away with his own rhetoric.

Judge Sirica rarely smiles, and he is quite impatient with attorneys who try to change his mind once it is made up.

### Concerned with being right

The judge has also emphasized his lack of concern over the appealing of his rulings. As he has put it, "I am only concerned with whether I am doing the right thing. All the Court of Appeals can do is reverse me—they can't tell me how to try cases."

"Incredible," he told a prospective woman juror who insisted under questioning that she had never heard of the Watergate affair despite the widespread publicity given it.

The judge lives up to the reputation for tough-mindedness that he acquired 28 years ago when he was a Republican assistant U.S. attorney who was appointed as chief counsel of a subcommittee investigating charges of favoritism in the Federal Communications Commission.

Aware of the long shadow of the Roosevelt administration, Judge Sirica reportedly took the job with the understanding that he could follow through on all leads. When he decided that Democratic committee members were likely to be influenced by the White House, he resigned, simultaneously denouncing the investigation as a "whitewash."



JOHN J. SIRICA

### Appointed by Eisenhower

In 1957, he was appointed by the late President Eisenhower to the federal bench and presided over the first tax evasion trial of Fred B. Black, an associate of Robert G. Baker, the former Senate aide who was jailed for income tax evasion, larceny and conspiracy.

It was reportedly Mr. Black who greeted the news that Judge Sirica would preside over his case with the exclamation, "He's a hanging judge!"

The White House shadow is also to be found in the case now before Judge Sirica, although the alleged trail from Watergate to the executive mansion so far leads no higher than Jeb S. Magruder, former deputy campaign manager of the Committee for the Re-election of the President, who, according to the prosecution, allocated \$250,000 to a defendant responsible for running a political espionage scheme against the Democrats.

The judge has already stated that it appeared the government had "an exceptionally strong case" against a defendant who has pleaded guilty to charges of burglary, conspiracy and illegal eavesdropping, as well as against his six codefendants.