

The Watergate Scandal's

Forgotten Man

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THE FORGOTTEN man in the Watergate scandal is 35-year-old Spencer Oliver, the only Democratic official known positively to have had his telephone tapped.

Oliver claims he has been dogged by trouble ever since the tiny black "bug" was discovered inside his phone by FBI agents last September.

"I am the only one damaged," declared the good-looking, personable lawyer, a former national president of the Young Democrats.

His plight has been overshadowed by the backbiting headlines on national Watergate developments at the White House and elsewhere.

Oliver's legal push to collect hefty damages, among other things, has caused a rift with Robert Strauss, Democratic party chairman. Last week Strauss dropped Oliver from the national committee payroll.

But Oliver can be expected to remain a thorn in Strauss' side for some time.

Oliver said he and his wife have been targets of cocktail-party jibes and "ugly vicious rumors" about his tapped conversation.

He suspects some were planted by Strauss' staff. One rumor said he had heard interesting rumors about the personal talk on Oliver's phone.

Oliver said he has had to retain two lawyers, to battle for his job and for what he sees as his rightful share of the damages expected from the Democrats' pending \$1 million civil suit against the Republican campaign committee for the break-in.

He claims the Democratic state chairmen have done Strauss and twice voted to retain Oliver as executive director of their association. They want to double his salary, Oliver said.

In the early stages of the case, during the criminal trial of the Watergate Seven,

Oliver won two rulings from the circuit court of appeals blocking release of his phone conversations.

His line was reportedly tapped for three and one-half weeks preceding the break-in.

No tapes of the conversations exist, Oliver said, except records based on the prosecutor's memory.

Oliver called himself "the first victim of the attempted cover-up."

He said Assistant U.S. Attorney Earl Silbert hoped to connect the case to an alleged Democratic attempt to force federal legislation that the politician was accused of "stealing" his father's seat in the House of Representatives.

Oliver said he was "not worried" they couldn't get any matter out of him if they tried. "I live off my salary in a small house in the suburbs, with my wife and three children."

He said Silbert and others told him they wanted to reveal his tapped conversations "to inflame the jury about this terrible invasion of privacy."

Their attempt to establish blackmail as the motive spurred all kinds of gossip about me. They were trying to bring out conversations that would look as if I were doing something politically or personally worth keeping with my position.

A hostile prosecutor can take that out of context and make you look pretty bad as the result."

The attorney in question, Silbert, said he had had "a long conversation" with Oliver. "I was trying to find out what questions we got hit with, but there's been a real frontier," Oliver said.

He is regarded as a liberal and Strauss as a conservative, which may account for some of their differences. Oliver claims he stayed neutral in Strauss' fight for the

party chairmanship, but Strauss is said to feel otherwise.

The rift surfaced when Oliver called a news conference recently and blew the whistle on Strauss' secret negotiations with former Attorney General John Mitchell to settle the case out of court.

Oliver said Strauss' lawyers disassociated themselves from him because there could be a conflict of interest. They decided they wanted to release my phone conversations.

"It is irresponsible party to do this," he added.

Oliver said the primary issue in the case was damages for invasion of privacy. "I don't want to see the Democrats' name used in a way that doesn't reflect the party's position on privacy."