

Teamsters Take Legal Business To Colson Firm

Associated Press

The Teamsters Union is transferring its \$100,000-a-year legal business from the law firm which pursued the Watergate bugging case for the Democrats to the law firm which will soon be joined by Charles W. Colson, a top political aide to President Nixon.

Sources say that Teamsters president Frank W. Fitzsimmons, one of Nixon's staunchest labor allies, unsuccessfully pressured the law firm of Edward Bennett Williams to back away from its aggressive pursuit of the Watergate case, a major political embarrassment to Nixon.

It could not be determined to what extent the White House encouraged Fitzsimmons to protest.

Williams refused to comment except to confirm, in response to questions, "that we have been terminated and have been instructed to turn over all pending matters at the end of the year to the law firm which Mr. Colson will be joining."

Williams said it was the Teamsters' prerogative to switch attorneys. He would not discuss the matter further.

Leaving White House

Colson has said he will be leaving the White House staff in the near future. He will be joining the law firm of Morin, Dickstein, Shapiro and Galligan.

Morin is Charles H. Morin, a former law partner of Colson before Colson joined the Nixon administration three years ago.

In response to questions, Morin said a Teamsters official had asked if the firm would be interested in discussing handling the union's legal affairs.

He characterized the talks

as "very, very preliminary" and "discussions more exploratory than anything else." He said he did not know the Teamsters had terminated the Williams firm, although Williams said he was directed to send material on Teamsters' cases to the Morin firm.

[Morin later issued a statement when a reporter inquired about his firm representing the Teamsters, although two employees of the firm immediately referred the reporter to Morin when the reporter asked to speak to "the partner handling the Teamsters representation."

(Morin later issued a statement confirming that the Teamster legal business was coming to his firm, but denying that this switch had anything to do with Colson.

["Our firm hopes," he said, that at some future date Charles W. Colson and probably others will join us. Mr. Colson has made no commitment to do so, and our representation of the Teamsters Union and other clients does not depend upon who our future partners may be."]

Weldon Mathis, a union vice president and executive assistant to Fitzsimmons, said the change in law firm was news to him. But he said "Fitz would make that decision" and that he hadn't seen the union chief for two weeks.

Colson could not be reached for comment.

Watergate Probe

The firm of Williams, Connolly and Califano began actively pursuing the Watergate case on behalf of the Democratic party in mid-June, even conducting its own investigation. Partner Joseph Califano was then counsel to the Democratic party. He once served former President Lyndon B. Johnson as a special White House assistant.

Sources familiar with the Teamsters' reaction gave this account:

Fitzsimmons personally expressed his dissatisfaction about the Watergate work done by the firm. He indicated he was partly reflecting White House unhappiness with the case—a politically charged affair involving at least two former White House aides, employees of the Committee for the Re-election of the President and the bugging of telephones at Democratic national headquarters.

One man indicted in the case had been hired by and worked for Colson.

The Williams firm, however, continued to pursue the case.

Finally, about a week ago, the Teamsters formally notified the law firm it was taking its business elsewhere.

Court records show the Williams firm had represented the international union since 1958 in cases across the country. Legal fees from the union amounted to more than \$100,000 a year.

Morin said his firm has handled other labor matters. He said he had not discussed Teamsters representation with Colson, who, he pointed out, is still responsible to the President.

Colson recommended to Nixon this year that the President commute the prison sentence of former Teamsters President James R. Hoffa. Hoffa was later freed.

Colson, in an interview with The Washington Post published Dec. 5, had said his recommendation of release of Hoffa was not connected to the Teamsters' endorsement of Nixon for re-election.

Colson did not mention the possibility his future law firm would get the union's business.