

9-28-73
10/1

Mr. Hunt's Mission

E. Howard Hunt Jr. has testified before the Senate Watergate committee in great detail about his secret mission to the Denver hospital bedside of Dita D. Beard, the lobbyist for the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation. According to his testimony, the White House plumber went on this extraordinary errand in a disguise furnished by the Central Intelligence Agency and with an "aide memoire" containing a specific line of interrogation, drawn up inside the White House. He not only was following instructions given by Special Presidential Counsel Charles W. Colson, but telephoned Mr. Colson during a break in the interrogation to report on the mission's progress.

John Ehrlichman had earlier told the committee that the plumbers' secret and illegal activities, such as the burglarizing of the office of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, were justified by the inherent powers of the Presidency to protect the nation's security. That interpretation of executive power is outrageous enough, but no legal imagination could be stretched so far as to condone the Denver foray.

A Presidential agent embarks on a secret journey to a sick woman's bedside. He carries orders from one of the President's closest associates to collect information of interest to the White House. The information sought, far from bearing on national security, deals simply and exclusively with a memorandum that linked the settlement of an antitrust suit against I.T.T. to the company's \$400,000 pledge to help underwrite the Republican national convention.

Mr. Hunt's testimony, which so far stands unchallenged, offers the clearest possible picture of illegal, undercover activities, masterminded from within the White House. These maneuvers by an agent of the President's special investigation unit were designed to protect, not the national security, but the security of an Administration caught in the act of breaking the law.