

Hill Unit Probes ITT Case Cover-Up

By Jack Anderson

While the big guns concentrate their fire on the Watergate cover-up, a House subcommittee is quietly looking into the earlier ITT cover-up. For the Watergate crimes were but an elaboration of the basic approach used during the ITT preliminaries.

Ex-White House counsel John Dean was the stage manager for the ITT cover-up, just as he was for the later Watergate cover-up. Last year, he was called behind closed doors to testify about his ITT role.

We have now obtained a transcript of his secret testimony. He calmly related to the Special Subcommittee on Investigations how his office had collected for safe keeping all White House documents dealing with ITT.

"One of the things they had done was collect—I didn't do it personally, another member of my staff did—all the documents in the White House, any documents dealing with ITT," testified Dean.

"To the best of my recollection and knowledge," he added, "those documents are still in a file in my former office. There were sensitive documents among those . . ."

"What kind of politically sensitive documents are you referring to?" asked chief counsel Daniel Manelli.

"Just names of individuals at the White House having correspondence with various people at ITT," replied Dean. "I can't

specifically tell you of any one document right now, but I can recall during the hearings the man in the office who did collect them, Fred Fielding, saying, 'Boy, you ought to see the one we caught today,' and him relating what it was."

Not until long after the Senate ITT hearings had ended did we learn that suppressed documents linked former Vice President Spiro Agnew, Treasury Secretary John Connally, Attorney General John Mitchell, and even President Nixon himself to the controversial ITT settlement.

Manelli questioned Dean about this. "There was a column by Jack Anderson some time back saying . . . Mr. Mitchell, Mr. Connally and, I believe, Vice President Agnew were involved in the politically sensitive files. Does that at all refresh your recollection?" asked Manelli.

"It doesn't," said Dean who was unable to recall any specific documents.

In dozens of particulars—from the shredding of incriminating documents to the perjured testimony—the tactics used by the White House crowd to wriggle out of Watergate had been fully rehearsed during the ITT siege.

This is significant, for it shows that the conduct of the presidency in Watergate was not the spontaneous, makeshift reaction of otherwise honorable men trapped in a dilemma, but rather a standard operating procedure developed and used

with growing success until cautious confidence became heedless arrogance.

Even the cast of characters was the same: John Dean, Charles Colson, E. Howard Hunt, G. Gordon Liddy and James McCord, not to mention other faceless White House aides. Dean directed the ITT cover-up, taking his instructions from H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, who remained behind the White House scenes.

The dirty work was left to Liddy and Hunt. According to the sworn testimony, Liddy spirited ITT star witness Dita Beard out of Washington before she could be subpoenaed to testify. When the FBI located her in Denver, Hunt rushed off to the Rockies to tell her what to say. He wore a preposterous CIA wig as a disguise.

Rep. Jake Pickle (D-Tex.) tried to question Dean about this. "I have a copy of . . . a UPI story, which reported that you were responsible for sending Mr. E. Howard Hunt to Denver to meet with Dita Beard," recounted Pickle. "It was suggested that the purpose of this trip was to develop a second Dita Beard memo which would contradict the memo published by Jack Anderson . . ."

"I can tell you that statement of my sending Howard Hunt to see Dita Beard is totally inaccurate," said Dean.

"Did you send Mr. Liddy?" asked Pickle.

"Nobody," said Dean.

"Do you know whether anyone was sent to Denver?"

"Yes, I do," Dean replied. But he refused to testify about the incident, because it might jeopardize his legal rights before the grand jury.

Chairman Harley Staggers (D-W.Va.) extracted testimony from Dean that former SEC Chairman William Casey had kept politically sensitive ITT documents away from the subcommittee by delivering them to the Justice Department.

"Did Mr. Casey suggest to you that the documents should be kept away from the subcommittee until after the election?" demanded Staggers.

"That was the general gist . . ." acknowledged Dean. "That was the way it came up, if they go to a committee of Congress, it is likely they will go into the public domain from there."

"Then, you gathered, they should be kept away from us until after the election?" asked Staggers.

"That is correct . . ." agreed Dean.

"Whose idea was it," pressed Staggers, "that these files should be sent over to the Justice Department?"

"I believe it was Mr. Casey who came to me . . ." Dean testified.

Other sworn testimony also identified Casey as the official whose backstage maneuvering kept the enlightening ITT documents out of congressional hands. Subsequently, Casey was rewarded with a promotion to be Under Secretary of State.

* 1974, United Feature Syndicate, Ind.