

Clayton Fritchey

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Henry Ruth Strikes Out

As cartoonist Herblock has so graphically suggested, Henry Ruth Jr., the last Watergate special prosecutor, will never be confused with Babe Ruth, the Sultan of Swat, for the latter hit 60 home runs in one season, while his namesake hit none at all in a whole year at bat.

Equally disappointing has been the indifferent reaction of officialdom to the anticlimactic wind-up report of the special prosecutor, which provides neither for further action nor further enlightenment. There is not even any reaction from Attorney General Edward Levi or members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, despite all their earlier expressed concern over the danger of the Watergate investigation petering out.

When Levi was up for confirmation he told the Senate, "I think the problem that bothers me is that it may very well be that the special prosecutor may at some point get rather tired of continuing his endeavors, and it is conceivable that some Attorney General might feel it is very important that he continue, or that he have a successor, even though he did not think so."

Levi went on to say he had "worried about" this. Sen. Philip Hart (D-Mich.) voiced his fear that the special prosecutor might "walk out any time he wants, announcing he is finished." Levi said, "I think it's very important that he not do that." Sen. Hart replied, "It is comforting to know that you will seek to persuade him to keep going or then come to us and ask us for advice and counsel."

Levi apparently did neither; nor is there any evidence that Hart or other interested

senators have asked the Attorney General for an explanation. Levi merely named a minor Justice Department official to carry out the routine of closing up the special prosecutor's office.

There is not room in a single column to review all the loose ends left untied, but a look at the futile inquiry into the relations between the Nixon administration and Howard Hughes is enough to inspire wonder about the efficacy of the special prosecutor's office down the homestretch.

There should have been a comprehensive report on the Hughes case if for no other reason than the billionaire's questionable connections (prior to Levi) with the Justice Department (to which the special prosecutor is attached), the CIA and other branches of the government which have been notoriously involved with Hughes.

The relations between this arrogant man, who believes money will buy anything, and Richard Nixon go back a long way. In 1957, just after Nixon was re-elected Vice President, Hughes made a covert \$205,000 "loan" to the Vice President's brother, Donald, to save his failing California restaurant. The "collateral" was a \$13,000 lot.

In 1969 or 1970, two manila envelopes containing \$50,000 each in \$100 bills were delivered to Nixon's crony, Charles (Bebe) Rebozo, by a Hughes agent. The \$100,000 in cash has been variously described as a belated 1968 campaign contribution, an advance offering for the 1970



congressional election and as an even more advance contribution toward Nixon's 1972 run for re-election.

Actually, it didn't go for any of these purposes. Instead, the cash ended up, Rebozo swears, in his safety deposit box. Later, Bebe returned \$100,000 to a Hughes attorney in 1973, but only after federal investigators discovered the transaction and began grilling Rebozo about it.

Meanwhile, back at the Nixon ranch, the Attorney General, then John Mitchell, overruled his own antitrust division and gave Hughes carte blanche to buy up more gambling casinos in Las Vegas. Nixon himself approved, over strong opposition, Hughes' acquisition of Air West. There is still the mysterious and extravagant CIA-Hughes collaboration on the Glomar Explorer project, and then there is that \$2

billion in defense contracts that Hughes enjoys.

Hughes is now under indictment, and has been for a year, on stock manipulation charges. The Justice Department, however, has shown no enthusiasm for prosecuting him. The only reason it finally charged him was that a grand jury refused to indict three associates of Hughes unless the evasive industrialist was included in the true bill.

Only under this and other pressures did the Justice Department reverse itself and allow the jury to name Hughes, but many still doubt the billionaire-Nixon supporter will ever be brought to trial. As one federal judge has said, trying to apply the judicial process to Hughes "is like twisting with a ghost."