

The Line of Fallen Lengthens

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And now it is Big John Connally, the latest in the long line of the mighty who have fallen.

Four former Cabinet officers—five if you include Spiro T. Agnew—the two top presidential assistants who between them exercised more power than the entire Nixon Cabinet and a score of lesser figures have all been named in Watergate-related criminal cases.

Some 23 of them have either pleaded or been found guilty. Others are yet to come to judgment. Collectively they form a record unparalleled in the history of the American presidency.

As the arguments being advanced during the impeachment inquiry strongly suggest, their crimes have been different from previous cases of high political corruption.

They involve crimes against the state and the system—crimes committed in the name of the presidency. When stitched together into a pattern of conduct they form an abuse of power.

But with the indictment yesterday of Connally on five counts of perjury, obstruction of justice and receiving illegal payments, the record of the Nixon administration takes on another cast.

The Connally case grows out of an older tradition of illicit political conduct. It is more in keeping with the Whiskey Ring, Credit Mobilier and Teapot Dome scandals of the past than with the Watergate of the present.

Accepting money in cash for personal use, twisting the arm of political contributors, promising a favor for a friend—these are the ingredients of the case against the flamboyant old political pro from Texas. It is the kind of case that easily enforces the cynical belief that "they all do it."

It is the "deal," the secret meeting, the fixing of a case and the background lobbying between the "special interests" and the government that typify the charges against Connally.

An aroma of the operator always has surrounded John

B. Connally. Tall, handsome, vain, colorful, icksy, confident, he has risen from poverty to prominence. Early on, after his University of Texas days, he became associated with the young congressman, Lyndon B. Johnson. Then and later he served as Johnson's protege and alter-ego.

They were much alike, those Texans. Strong-willed, driven, ambitious and energetic, they both amassed money and political power. One became President, the other sought that highest office. To their critics, they were "wheeler-dealers." To their supporters, they were members of a new breed of Southern politicians. In reality, they were hard to characterize.

Years ago Lyndon Johnson once defined himself politically in these words:

"I am a free man, an American, a United States senator, and a Democrat, in that order. I am also a liberal, a conservative, a Texan, a taxpayer, a rancher, a businessman, a consumer, a parent, a voter and not as young as I expect to be—and I am all these things in no fixed order."

Such of the same could be said about Connally. He served John F. Kennedy as Secretary of the Navy and was himself wounded on that day in Dallas nearly 11 years ago.

He was a powerful governor of Texas, a staunch backer of LBJ, a skillful legal advocate for the oil and banking interests, and then one of the most forceful figures to serve President Richard Nixon.

When he returned to Washington to join Mr. Nixon's Cabinet as Treasury Secretary, Connally immediately stepped into the forefront as someone to watch politically. He understood power and wielded it effectively. In an administration singularly lacking in color, he was a breath of fresh air.

The President himself is said to have been transfixed and entranced by the way Connally worked.

In the closely contained atmosphere of the Nixon White House, where access to the President was jealously guarded, John Con-

nally had virtually unlimited entree to the Oval Office. His counsel was sought and given.

After the first Nixon term, Connally returned to his lucrative private law practice in Texas. But a year ago in May, when the Watergate scandal was crashing around the White House, Connally dramatically switched his political allegiance from the Democrats to the Republicans.

He immediately joined the White House staff as an unpaid, part-time presidential adviser. What precise role Connally played in that difficult period for the President has never been entirely spelled out.

Some of Connally's friends have said he "talked tough" to the President about Watergate, and that the President didn't like it. In any event, Connally's counsel no longer was sought. Last summer his resignation from the President's staff was announced.

Connally continued to speak out for the President, and he remained a possible Republican contender for the 1976 nomination.

Last fall as the impeachment machinery began to be

put into action following the dismissal of Archibald Cox as special prosecutor, Connally strongly argued against impeachment.

"There is an element of hatred in this controversy," he said, "the smell of a vendetta, and if wise and cooler heads in both political parties don't take control, we national trauma than we national trauma than we have heretofore experienced."

By then, the President's men were falling everywhere. Like the dominoes, they all came tumbling down, one after the other: Agnew, Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Mitchell, Colson, Kleindeinst, Stans, Strachan, Magruder, Krogh, Mardian, LaRue, Chapin, Kalmbach, Porter.

Now Connally's name has been added to that mournful roll call. If convicted on all counts against him, he faces a maximum of 19 years in prison and a \$50,000 fine. Not over Watergate and national security but over a milk fund case and a payment in cash.

Of that original key Nixon team, no one remains. Except, of course, the President himself.