

A New 'Gung-Ho' Justice Official

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Richard Lewis Thornburgh

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WASHINGTON, July 9 —

—“He has not always been a quiet man, but he has been an effective one.” So, with characteristic understatement, Attorney General Edward H. Levi

spoke yesterday of Richard L. Thornburgh, to whom moments later administered the oath as head of the Justice Department's Criminal Division.

Mr. Thornburgh comes to the department's headquarters from Pittsburgh, where since 1969 he has gained a reputation as an aggressive and outspoken United States Attorney and, in the words of one former associate, a “gung-ho” adversary of public corruption.

Mr. Thornburgh has earned the esteem of most of the country's 93 other United States Attorneys, and his appointment will most likely cheer his former colleagues. Many of them have felt cut off in recent years from policymaking in Washington, and now, for the first time since the Eisenhower Administration, they will have one of their own for their boss.

A Scholarly Air

Although Mr. Thornburgh's receding hairline and prim, horn-rimmed glasses give him a scholarly air, his six-year tenure in Pittsburgh has been anything but benign, resulting in the prosecution of more than 20 public officials and organized crime figures. His targets have included

a former Republican Congressman, J. Irving Whalley, who was convicted in a kick-back case in 1973; state prosecutors, a United States customs agent, a county sheriff, several police officials, a city councilman, a constable and a magistrate.

Some observers in western Pennsylvania have said that Mr. Thornburgh, a 42-year-old Republican, has paid particular attention to Democratic officials in his search for official wrongdoing.

But a former associate, who does not count himself among Mr. Thornburgh's close friends, dismisses this with the assurance that “the people I know worked for him felt he was an honest guy and not subject to [political] pressures.”

Mr. Thornburgh seemed mindful at his swearing-in ceremony in Mr. Levi's conference room of the controversy that had swirled around his predecessor, Henry E. Petersen, over the vigor of the Criminal Division's investigation and prosecution of several Watergate-related cases in 1972 and early 1973.

Special Responsibility

“All of us,” he told the assembled Justice Department officials and lawyers, “have a special responsibility to renew, perpetuate and carry on the confidence of the American people in the institutions that they and we have devised and made use of to provide a true system of criminal justice.”

A former director of the American Civil Liberties Union, he promised that he would accomplish his goals

with a firm respect for the “rights and liberties” of “criminal victims and suspects.”

Mr. Thornburgh recently told an acquaintance that he had just read Theodore H. White's account of the political scandals that engulfed the Nixon Administration and said that the “one lesson” he had learned from Watergate was that “partisan politics has no place in the administration of justice.”

Richard Lewis Thornburgh was born July 16, 1932, in Rosslyn Farms, a suburb of Pittsburgh. His father was an engineer, and in 1954 Mr. Thornburgh received an engineering degree from Yale University. But he decided that he was inept in the technical aspects of engineering and entered law school at the University of Pittsburgh. He graduated in 1957 with high honors.

Joined Law Firm

After two years as a legal counsel with the Aluminum Company of America, he joined a Pittsburgh law firm where, for 10 years, he specialized in merger work and corporation law.

He might have remained in private practice, he says, but for an unusual turning point that took place one night in November, 1964, as he watched President Johnson trounce Senator Barry Goldwater in the Presidential election.

“I really faulted the Republican moderates who sat on their duffs and let the extremists from the far right take over,” Mr. Thornburgh said in recalling his reaction,



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Bars partisan politics

one that led him two years later into an unsuccessful Congressional race.

An energetic man who has written many of his own news releases and delivered as many as 100 speeches a year on law enforcement problems, Mr. Thornburgh likes to spend what spare time he has with his family—his second wife, the former Virginia Walton Judson, and his four sons.

The first Mrs. Thornburgh was killed in 1960 in an automobile accident in which one of his sons suffered extensive brain damage.

The new Assistant Attorney General eschews standard hobbies. He said that he gave up golf 20 years ago and tennis five years ago and is “not a woodmaker or anything like that.”

He likes to read biographies and history, however, and an occasional novel, including those by George V. Higgins, the former Massachusetts prosecutor who, according to Mr. Thornburgh, writes “marvelous dialogue.”