

Watergate Prelude --The ITT Coverup



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WHILE THE big guns concentrate their fire on the Watergate coverup, a House subcommittee is quietly looking into the earlier ITT coverup. 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 coverup, just as he was for the later Watergate coverup. 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 safekeeping all White House documents dealing with ITT.

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“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 docu-

ment 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 political-sensitive files. Does that at all refresh your recollection?” asked Manelli.

“It doesn’t,” said Dean who was unable to recall any specific documents.

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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.