

Ehrlichman's He Clashes Senators Told Dean To Blame

Washington

John D. Ehrlichman clashed with the Senate Watergate committee yesterday as he sought to "refute every charge of illegal conduct on my part."

The former assistant to the President for domestic matters insisted, in his first day-long appearance at the televised Watergate hearings, that President Nixon had been thwarted in his "continued effort" to give the nation a "full, factual account" of the Watergate break-in and coverup.

Ehrlichman said that John W. Dean III, the former White House legal counsel, had misled the White House about the affair.

Ehrlichman declared that both he and the President were convinced there had been nothing illegal in the activities of a secret White House intelligence unit whose members had burglarized the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist in 1971 as part of a "national security" mission.

He conceded having initiated other, still undisclosed so-called national security wiretaps but maintained that he could not discuss them.

AWARE

He conceded having been aware, soon after the June 17, 1972 burglary at the Democratic party's Watergate headquarters, that funds were being assembled for the criminal defendants.

But he insisted that his understanding had been that the fund-raising effort was no more unusual than public subscription campaigns on behalf of Ellsberg in the Pentagon Papers trial or defendants in other celebrated conspiracy cases.

Ehrlichman quarreled with Samuel Dash, the Senate panel's chief counsel. He "respectfully" disagreed with Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr. of North Carolina, the Demo-

cratic committee chairman. He resorted, in reply to several direct questions, to the explanation that he could not recall coverup incidents alleged to have involved him.

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TONE

From the moment that Ehrlichman thrust his right arm high in the air to take the oath as a witness, he adhered to the tone that he set in a 30-page prepared statement casting Dean as the coverup culprit, accusing the senators of having suf-

fered a "shrinkage of perspective" and blaming the news media for spreading "falsehoods and misunderstandings."

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Ehrlichman's interrogators, allied with an audience that applauded Ervin frequently and laughed disrespectfully at a number of Ehrlichman's assertions, responded in kind.

Dash prodded the witness, more than once, to avoid "anticipating my questions" and Ervin, his eyebrows arching into dubious expressions, cast his inquiries in phrases bordering on scorn.

The tone was illustrated in one exchange late in the day with Ervin.

"Are we to believe," the Senator asked mockingly, that the Committee for the Re-Election of the President "gave \$450,000 to burglars simply because it felt sorry for them?"

Unruffled by the applause and laughter that the question evoked in the crowded hearing room, Ehrlichman calmly replied in his strong voice and sure manner, "I'm

afraid that I'm not your best witness on that, Senator."

Did the President's campaign associates believe in the cause of burglary and wiretapping? Ervin wondered aloud.

"No sir," said the witness. "I didn't contribute a nickel."

By the end of Ehrlichman's opening day at the witness table, the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities had barely begun to interrogate him about the charges

lodged against Ehrlichman by Dean and other previous witnesses.

They have yet to explore

in any detail the allegations that Ehrlichman had sought a guarantee of presidential clemency for E. Howard Hunt, a convicted Watergate conspirator, or that Ehrlichman had helped map a coverup effort at meetings in La Costa, Calif., last February.

PLUMBERS

Much of the day was taken up with a minute and quarrelsome examination of Ehrlichman's role and motives in having supervised the White House "Plumbers" unit set up in 1971 to try to plug leaks of government secrets.

"So there came a time when you were administering an investigative unit?" Dash asked.

"Yes, in a literal sense, that is true," Ehrlichman answered.

"Literal sense?" the chief counsel asked quizzically.

"Yes sir," the witness asserted.

"Not in an actual sense?" Dash countered.

"Well," said Ehrlichman, "here I am dueling with a professor."

"I am not dueling with you," Dash insisted.

"Professor, if you say actual, it is actual," Ehrlichman said with a wry grin.

ISSUES

Ehrlichman contended in his long opening statement that he was eager to "set the record straight" on both legitimate and spurious issues raised by the Senate investigators. He denounced the charges of Dean, that the President had been paranoid about domestic dissent and the White House consumed with Watergate.

"Mr. Dean's explanation (of the atmosphere in which Watergate had its genesis) is simply that we were all suffering from some advanced form of neurosis and nothing else. — some strange White House madness. He suggests he was the only sane one in the bunch."

Ehrlichman went on to declare that the President and his associates had been concerned that civil strife — fire bombings and anti-war marches — would upset delicate diplomatic initiatives.

He volunteered the view

that the bombings and demonstrations were serious enough as isolated events. But "taken as part of an apparent campaign to force upon the President a foreign policy favorable to the North Vietnamese and their allies."

FUNDS

Ehrlichman denied that he assured Herbert W. Kalmbach, Mr. Nixon's private attorney, of the propriety of raising funds last summer for Watergate defendants and their lawyers.

Kalmbach testified last week that Ehrlichman gave specific assurances. And Kalmbach reiterated the point in a telephone conversation with Ehrlichman this spring which Ehrlichman recorded and later had to yield to the Senate committee under subpoena.

But Ehrlichman insisted Kalmbach did not ask him for reassurance, and that Ehrlichman's own information on the money-raising plan had come from Dean.

QUIBBLE

The quibbles between Ehrlichman and his interrogators over words and meanings were illustrated in one exchange between the former Seattle zoning lawyer and committee Chairman Ervin, over the phone call with Kalmbach.

"Didn't you bug that phone conversation with Kalmbach?" asked Ervin.

"No," said Ehrlichman.

Q. "Didn't you record it?"

A. "Yes."

New York Times



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JOHN D. EHRLICHMAN TESTIFIED BEFORE SENATE COMMITTEE
President Nixon's former domestic adviser was a day-long witness