

...Who Gave the Orders?

The contention by four of the original Watergate defendants and by E. Howard Hunt that their guilty pleas to the charges of conspiracy, burglary and wire-tapping had been entered erroneously and involuntarily places the unfinished business of Watergate once again into sharp focus. It serves as a reminder that the sentencing of the burglars failed to answer a most important question on this aspect of the case: Who gave the orders?

There was never doubt that the four burglars or "plumbers"—Bernard L. Barker, Frank A. Sturgis, Virgilio R. Gonzales and Eugenio R. Martinez—had been duped into a venture they hardly understood. Chief Judge John J. Sirica, who sentenced the men harshly but only provisionally, pending review, made no secret of the fact that their confessions of guilt, unrelated to orders from high authority, had failed to convince him. Indeed, he appeared to have extended a standing invitation to the four to come back for less draconian punishment as soon as they were ready to put an end to their silent martyrdom.

The unlucky quartet now seems to feel that the time has come to lift the veil from their part in the affair. Self-serving as their effort to re-open the case

may be, their lawyer's statement that the guilty pleas had been "false and involuntarily entered" in the belief that their silence was dictated by "national security interests" implies an alleged cover-up by higher authority.

It is, of course, true that being caught redhanded hardly justifies a plea of guilty. Fairness nevertheless calls for a determination of relative guilt. The lawyers' new briefs contain the serious charge of justice obstructed on order from higher authority.

Beyond the matter of ordinary justice, there looms the task of preventing the use of underlings as scape-goats to cover up high-level subversion of the nation's true security. At the very least, it is essential to determine at whose orders the Watergate burglars remained silent during their trial and what rewards may have been offered to them for such silence.