

Judge Sirica Orders the Silence

By Lawrence Stern

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Judge John J. Sirica slapped an extraordinarily sweeping order on all parties to the Watergate case yesterday directing them not to talk about it outside of court.

The order, which covers all government officials, defendants, lawyers and witnesses, was announced from the bench by the chief judge of the U.S. District Court here after the Watergate grand jury returned its first batch of indictments.

It enjoins them "from making extra judicial statements concerning any aspect of this case that is likely to interfere with the rights of the accused or the public to a fair trial by an impartial jury."

The ruling did not, however, inhibit

a number of the principal defendants in declaring either directly or through attorneys that they are innocent of the charges in the indictments.

Former White House special counsel Charles Colson curtailed plans for a full-scale news conference on the subject of his indictment when his lawyers received word of Sirica's order.

He confined himself to a prepared statement, delivered with his wife, Patricia, at his side. He announced that he was taking leave from his law firm because of "continued adverse publicity associated with this case."

Colson went on to proclaim that "my conscience is clear. Regardless of how rough the road may be, I know that in the end my innocence will be established because I put complete faith in God and I believe deeply in my country."

Colson was indicted on separate counts of conspiracy and obstruction of justice.

The attorney for former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, William J. Hundley, described Sirica's injunction as "the toughest kind of order . . . the kind of order which would compel any lawyer to 'no comment' on this case."

Mitchell, emerging from his conspiracy trial in New York yesterday, refused to comment on his new indictment.

"I have no comment whatsoever on what happened in Washington because Judge Sirica informed all persons connected with the matter that they should refrain from discussing it," said Mitchell as he left U.S. District Court. "That's just what I'm doing."

"No comment," echoed John J. Wil-

of All Parties to Indictment

son, attorney for former White House aides H. R. (Bob) Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman on the news of the indictments. "The word 'no comment' has to do with everything," Wilson said.

Haldeman confined himself to a terse observation in a telephone interview with the Associated Press. "I haven't even seen the indictment," he said. "I have no comment and will have none for the time being."

Kenneth W. Parkinson, another of the inditees and former attorney for the 1972 Nixon re-election committee, issued a statement through his law office that "I am innocent of the charges set forth in the indictment. My connection with the events was as a lawyer seeking honorably and diligently to serve my clients . . ."

Attorneys for former Assistant Attorney General Robert C. Mardian declined to discuss his indictment or the order. They said they would be surprised, however, if Mardian were to plead anything other than "not guilty" at his arraignment.

The effect of Sirica's order would be to shut down the network of sources which has been fueling much Watergate journalistic enterprise over the past 20 months.

"Informed" and "reliable" sources have been the trademark of attribution for a large number of Watergate revelations which have appeared in print or flashed on the television screen.

These sources have been attorneys, defendants, witnesses or government investigators associated with the case

—the very targets of Sirica's silencing order.

An attorney in the case, who requested not to be identified, commented to a reporter that the Sirica order "only hurts you guys."

The judge's injunction for silence goes well beyond the scope of the District of Columbia's "free press-fair trial" rule which enumerates specific areas of comment in which lawyers in criminal cases may and may not engage.

The White House confined itself to a brief comment on the seven indictments yesterday. "The President is confident," the White House said, "that all Americans will join in recognizing that those indicted are presumed innocent unless proof of guilt is established in the courts."