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TWO RICH TEXANS GO ON TRIAL TODAY

Sons of H. L. Hunt Will Face Wiretapping Charges

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LUBBOCK, Tex., Sept. 15—

The wiretapping trial of two wealthy oil men, Nelson Bunker Hunt and William Herbert Hunt, opens here tomorrow.

It poses the following questions:

¶Can the two brothers, sons of the billionaire H. L. Hunt, get a fair trial in a West Texas cow town?

¶Can their two Jewish lawyers from the despised "Eastern establishment" sway a jury of cotton farmers?

¶Did the Central Intelligence Agency, as the Hunts have charged, have the brothers indicted because they refused to allow their foreign oil interests to be used as a C.I.A. cover?

¶Did trusted employes steal \$50-million from H. L. Hunt in his waning years?

¶Was political pressure exerted to stop prosecution of the Hunts?

The two brothers, whose fortunes are estimated to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars, are accused of hiring private detectives in 1969 to wiretap the telephones of associates of their father.

Taps Held Justified

The Hunts assert that the conviction this last summer of two Hunt Oil Company employes whose phones were tapped is proof that the wiretaps were justified.

The two employes, John Curington and John H. Brown, were convicted in Dallas in July and sentenced to probation.

A public relations consultant, C. T. Fleet of Denver, hired for the trial beginning tomorrow, said that an estimated \$50-million had been embezzled from the H.L.H. Food Products Division of the Hunt Oil Company before his clients, the Hunt brothers, hired the private detectives.

Two of the defense attorneys,

Philip Hirschkop and Jonathan Shapiro of Alexandria, Va., have offered an explanation for the legal predicament of the Hunt brothers.

The two lawyers, who wear motorcycle boots with their conservative business suits, said that Bunker Hunt, 49 years old, and Herbert Hunt, 46, were indicted after they refused to allow the C.I.A. to infiltrate the Hunt International Petroleum Company's operations in Libya.

These oil operations have since been nationalized by the Libyan Government.

The Hunts were indicted in February, 1973, well after the two private detectives who had installed the telephone taps had gone to prison. The taps were in force from Nov. 20, 1969, to Jan. 16, 1970, when they were discovered by accident.

The detectives, J. J. Kelly and Patrick McCann 3d of Houston, said under threat of additional prison terms that they had been hired by the Hunt brothers. They will be the major Government witnesses in the trial.

Other Indictments

The Hunts and several others, including Percy Foreman, Texas lawyer, were indicted last July for conspiring to obstruct justice by bribing the two detectives not to talk. Trial on those charges is pending.

There have been widespread allegations that political pressure was brought in Washington to keep the Hunts from being prosecuted. Senator James O. Eastland of Mississippi, the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, made several inquiries about the case to the Justice Department. Senator Eastland has vigorously denied reports that he was paid \$50,000 to do this.

The trial on the wiretap charges was moved from Dallas, where the offense occurred, to Lubbock, a cattle and cotton town on the Texas plains.

The trial has not excited any interest here, where the cool weather of the last week has been the big news. Farmers fear that the 50-degree temperatures may damage the cotton crop.

Because the "Eastern establishment" is a favorite political whipping boy in ultraconservative West Texas, the Hunts have hired a former state prosecutor from this area, Travis Shelton, as part of the defense team.

Prosecutors will be from the staff of the United States Attorney for North Texas, Frank McCown of Fort Worth. The trial judge will be Federal District Judge Halbert O. Woodward, who was appointed to the bench in 1968 by President Johnson.

If convicted, the Hunts could receive up to five years in prison.