

Dean Was Fired From First Law Job

By Jack Anderson

White House counsel John Wesley Dean III, who prepares all President Nixon's legal opinions, was fired from his first law job for "unethical conduct."

Civil Service Commission files contain a form, dated Aug. 30, 1967, and marked "Inquiry For United States Government Use Only," which gives a report on Dean's dismissal from the prestigious Washington law firm of Welch and Morgan.

The form is signed by Vincent B. Welch, senior partner, who checked "Yes" after the question: "To your knowledge has (Dean) ever been discharged or has he resigned from any employment after being told his conduct or work was not satisfactory?"

Under "reason for discharge or resignation," Welch wrote: "Unethical conduct." Asked to "please explain fully," he added "While employed by this firm, applicant undertook work unbeknownst to us at the time, in direct conflict with the interests of the firm and a client thereof."

The handsome, blond, 34-year-old Dean has provided the legal support for President Nixon's battle with Congress, including the blanket claim of executive privilege, the broad use of the pocket veto and the impoundment of appropriated funds.

The President also assigned

Dean to investigate the Watergate mess, although Dean personally had brought one of the Watergate ringleaders, G. Gordon Liddy, into the White House. Not surprisingly, Dean produced a white-wash report exonerating all present White House employees.

The FBI, conducting its own investigation, asked Dean whether E. Howard Hunt, the other Watergate ringleader, had an office in the White House executive office building. Dean claimed not to know, although three days earlier, he had sent aides to search Hunt's office, drill open his safe and clear out any incriminating documents. Even L. Patrick Gray, the acting FBI director, was compelled under oath to admit that Dean "probably lied" to the FBI. This happens to be a federal offense.

Dean Fired

Dean was fired from the Welch and Morgan firm, according to the Civil Service files, on Feb. 4, 1966. He wangled a political appointment as minority counsel to the House Judiciary Committee, under auspices of Rep. William McCulloch (R-Ohio). The following year, Dean was appointed associate director of the National Commission on Reform of Criminal Laws.

Among his duties, he directed a study of "conflict of interest"—the very offense

that brought his discharge from the Welch and Morgan firm. A spokesman of the firm refused to confirm or deny that Dean had been fired.

However, attorneys formerly associated with the firm told us Dean was kicked out of the office after he was caught in a conflict over a St. Louis television application. One attorney described his exit as a "forced departure." Another reported more explicitly that Dean wasn't even allowed to pick up his belongings, which were returned to him by mail.

Secret Application

According to this source, Dean had been assigned by the firm to prepare an application for a television license for the Continental Summit Television, Corp. At the same time, he allegedly filed a secret, rival application for himself and some friends. Our source said this was grounds for disbarment, but out of compassion, the firm merely fired him. Another former member of the firm, while agreeing on the circumstances, questioned whether Dean could have been disbarred.

We checked the files at the Federal Communications Commission and found, curiously, that the paperwork handled by Dean is missing from the file. Of course, this may be inadvertent.

We spoke to several attorneys who have worked with

Dean. Some describe his work as mediocre at best; others say he is both charming and intelligent. He has used self-hypnosis, says one source, to improve his concentration.

Increasingly, however, the embattled Dean appears to be a weak pillar for the President to rest his bold legal doctrines on. Yet only last week, the President phoned Dean from Key Biscayne, Fla., to express his full support. Press secretary Ron Ziegler made a point of emphasizing this to newsmen. "The President," said Ziegler, "has complete confidence in Mr. Dean and wanted me again, here this morning, to specifically express President Nixon's absolute, total confidence in Mr. Dean in this regard."

Footnote: Civil Service Commission files show that two and a half years later Welch watered down the unethical conduct charge. Former firm members explained that he acted on appeal from Dean's political friends. The files show he wrote a letter, dated Oct. 29, 1968, to the Civil Service Commission declaring the unethical conduct charge "may have been an overstatement." Welch added rather vaguely: "A more apt characterization of Mr. Dean's departure would be to describe it as having resulted from a basic disagreement over law firm policies regarding the nature and scope of an associate's activities."