

Trial Hears Nixon Urge Firm Stand

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Richard M. Nixon said in April of 1973 that he wanted all those who raised money in the Watergate cover-up to "stick to their line" that they were not obstructing justice.

The then-President acknowledged at the same time in talks with his top aides that "the bad part" of the scandal was "the obstruction of justice thing, which it appears to be."

Despite that, Mr. Nixon said of former Attorney General John N. Mitchell and other aides whom he expected to be indicted:

"I think they all ought to fight and say this was not an obstruction of justice. We were simply trying to help these (original Watergate) defendants."

Mr. Nixon made the remarks to White House aides H. R. (Bob) Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman at a late-afternoon meeting on April 14, 1973, and returned to the theme again and again that crucial weekend as they discussed the collapse of efforts to contain the Watergate scandal.

"God damn it," Mr. Nixon told Haldeman in a late night phone call on April 14, "all these guys that participated in raising the money and so forth have got to stick to their line that they could not raise this money to obstruct justice."

The alarms that rang through the White House came through loud and clear at the Watergate cover-up trial as special prosecutors pressed to complete their case with a flurry of presidential tapes.

The now-pardoned President and his two top aides, the recordings showed, had been hopeful of getting Mitchell to

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Lawyer William O. Bittman's testimony apparently disputed. Page B1.

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take the blame for the Watergate break-in and bugging, but Ehrlichman reported on April 14 that the overtures had failed.

Instead, Ehrlichman reported, Mitchell "lobbed, uh, mud balls at the White House at every opportunity" in a talk the two men had just had about how the scandals got started.

Resigned to Mitchell's indictment, the White House high command turned to other problems such as the enlistment of Mr. Nixon's personal lawyer, Herbert W. Kalmbach, in the fund-raising efforts after the Watergate burglars were first arrested in June of 1972.

Ehrlichman and Haldeman told the President that White House counsel John W. Dean III had asked each of them if he could "go to Kalmbach" and give him the assignment.

"Go to Kalmbach for the purpose of?" Mr. Nixon asked the two aides.

"For the purpose of getting Herb to raise some money," Ehrlichman replied crisply. "For the purpose of paying

the defendants. For the purpose of keeping them 'on the reservation, unquote."

With testimony like that, Mr. Nixon suggested candidly, "they could try to tie you and Bob (Haldeman) in a conspiracy to obstruct justice."

"That's his (Dean's) theory," Ehrlichman agreed. Haldeman remained silent.

By nightfall, Mr. Nixon was still poring over the problem that hush-money allegations could pose. Jeb Stuart Magruder, former deputy director for the Nixon campaign, had just started talking to government prosecutors. Other campaign strategists like Frederick C. LaRue and Robert C. Mardian, along with Kalmbach, might also be dragged in.

The President called Haldeman first, and then Ehrlichman, emphasizing the importance of what he had told them earlier in the day.

"I think you thought I was sort of, sort of being facetious about saying get everybody, all those people and this includes LaRue and Mardian and of course, uh, of course, Kalmbach," Mr. Nixon told Ehrlichman. "Uh, they gotta have it, and Dean, too. They gotta have a straight damn line that, of course we raised money."

The President said they could "be very honest" about that. "But, uh," he added, "we raised the money for a purpose that we thought was perfectly proper . . . We didn't want to shut 'em up. These men were guilty . . . Right?"

"Right," Ehrlichman replied.

The exchange had been excised by the Nixon White House last spring when it made public a censored transcript of the taped conversation.

It was not the only extract that was made public yesterday for the first time. Dean has said that he met with the

President on Sunday, April 15, and, in a showdown conversation that Mr. Nixon has said was never recorded, told him he was now cooperating with government prosecutors. By the next morning, Monday, April 16, 1973, the President expressed his mounting concern.

He told Ehrlichman and Haldeman that he wanted them to "put both your cases down at their worth" so that Mr. Nixon could evaluate them.

"The second point," the President told them, "is that uh, I would also like a scenario evolved with the regard to, uh, the President's rôle, in other word, when the Pres-

ident began to find out about this, what he did."

Mr. Nixon said that he thought it could be "a pretty good role" because he had told Dean the month before to make a report on the Watergate scandal. When Dean came back and said he couldn't do it, Mr. Nixon recalled, Ehrlichman was assigned to the task.

This conversation, too, had been deleted by the Nixon White House from the transcripts it made public last spring.

Ehrlichman lent a sense of urgency to a White House statement of some sort. He said White House press secretary Ronald L. Zeigler "feels we have no more than 12 hours."

"Uh, he, he's got some input from The (Washington) Post and uh, it's his estimate that unless we take the initiative by 9 o'clock tonight, uh, it will be too late," Ehrlichman reported.