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Fast Bounce

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The rules governing conflict of interest seem to sit lightly on Charles W. Colson, who is quitting next March 1 as President Nixon's special counsel and labor liaison. The union with which Mr. Colson has been chummiest through his years at the White House is the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and that union has now made known its intention to switch its lucrative legal account to the law firm the President's aide is expected to join.

No union has had more familiarity with the Government, the law and the courts in recent years than the giant truck union. Congress passed the Landrum-Griffin Labor Reform Act in 1959 primarily because of the McClellan Committee's revelations of malpractices and underworld influence in the Teamsters. Mr. Colson has played a leading role in restoring the union's public respectability by fostering cordial relations between President Nixon and Frank E. Fitzsimmons, head of the Teamsters.

One fruit of that cordiality was action by the executive board of the two-million-member union making it the first labor organization in the country to endorse Mr. Nixon for re-election. The Teamsters also have had a few things to feel good about, though Administration spokesmen insist that none involved any element of political *quid pro quo*.

A year ago, on Mr. Colson's strong recommendation, the President decided to commute the jail sentence of Mr. Fitzsimmons' predecessor, James R. Hoffa. Mr. Nixon acted only four months after the United States Parole Board had refused for the third time to free Mr. Hoffa.

The Justice Department decided not to move on information turned over to it by the Labor Department involving alleged misuse of union funds by Mr. Fitzsimmons' son Richard, recording secretary of a Detroit Teamster local. Justice Department officials say the case was too unsubstantial to prosecute, but union sources say White House pressure was brought to bear.

The most ambitious proposal put forward by the Administration for protecting the public against strike emergencies became a casualty of the White House-Teamster alliance. The union's endorsement of Mr. Nixon coincided with a White House decision to kill the President's request for Congressional approval of a bill drawn up by Treasury Secretary Shultz for compulsory arbitration of major disputes in trucking, railroads, airlines and other transportation fields.

Teamster officials are brutally frank about the political realities behind the union's substitution of the Colson law firm for the one that has been representing the Democrats in the civil suit growing out of the bugging of the party headquarters in the Watergate complex. "It just made sense to have him as lawyer," a union source told The Times.

There is nothing novel in this notion that it helps to buy up someone fresh out of the upper echelons of Government. Many of the nation's foremost corporations do it regularly.

The United States Criminal Code contains a long list of prohibitions on conflict-of-interest relationships by former officials in fields over which they once had jurisdiction, but these prove so nebulous in practice that almost anything goes. That situation will not change until Congress lays down rules that will operate effectively to safeguard the integrity of Government process and outlaw influence-peddling.