

Watergate: Look Ma, No Hands

As the Senate takes up the issue of the establishment of a select committee to investigate the Watergate affair and related campaign espionage and finance issues, a major question in that debate will be credibility. The central issue, of course, is the re-establishment and the protection of the integrity of the electoral process. But, beyond that, there is the issue of the credibility of the government about what we have been told and the integrity of the investigations which have taken place.

The total impression which it seems the White House and the Committee for the Reelection of the President have sought to give has been that the Watergate affair, the Segretti affair and any similar activities were simply the bizarre zealotry of a group of underlings who had no authority to do what they did. From the artful denials by Mr. Ziegler and his fulsome denunciation of the media for running the story, the statements that the White House counsel, Mr. John Dean, had found that no one "presently employed" at the White House had been involved with the Watergate burglary, to the careful circumscribed investigation made by the FBI and prosecution brought by the Department of Justice, the whole message has been, "Look Ma, No Hands."

The latest, and one of the clearest examples of this strategy came last week in Charles Colson's televised interview with Elizabeth Drew on the Public Broadcasting Service. A portion of the transcript reads as follows:

"Drew: . . . One of those who pleaded guilty was Mr. Hunt who was your friend, who was brought into the White House by you. What did you bring him in the White House to do?"

"Colson: He was brought in as a consultant, Liz, to

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work on the Pentagon Papers project . . . the security aspects of the fact that highly classified, government documents had been stolen and published. And that was in 1971.

"Drew: Did you keep track of what he was doing when he was there?"

"Colson: No." (Emphasis added.)

Next, Mrs. Drew asked Mr. Colson whether we are ever going to know the whole truth about the burglary. Mr. Colson replied: "Well, I don't know whether the case is closed or not. It would be inappropriate for me to comment on the judicial process, it may well be that on appeal the case will be reopened. I really know very little about the case, as I've said publicly. I knew nothing about the Watergate, had no involvement in it. And what I know about the case is what I read, and I assume I can believe some of the things I read." (Emphasis added.)

Well, maybe Mr. Colson really had no supervisory authority over Mr. Hunt while Mr. Hunt worked at the White House. And, of course, it is possible that, as consumed as he says he was by the campaign, Mr. Colson nonetheless had virtually no contact with the Watergate issue—despite its massive presence in the campaign. All of that is possible. In this case, almost *anything* is possible. That is precisely why we entirely agree with Judge Sirica who, after listening to weeks of testimony said, "I am still not satisfied that all of the pertinent facts that might be available . . . have been produced . . ." And that is also why we share the judge's hope that the Senate investigation will "try to get to the bottom of what happened in this case."