

EHRLICHMAN DENIES ILLEGALITY;
SAYS DEAN MISLED WHITE HOUSE;
HE DEFENDS ELLSBERG BREAK IN

JUL 25 1973

WITNESS DEFIANT

Clashes With Panel's
Chairman and the
Chief Counsel

By JAMES M. NAUGHTON
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WASHINGTON, July 24 —

John D. Ehrlichman clashed with the Senate Watergate committee today as he sought to "refute every charge of illegal conduct on my part."

The former assistant to President Nixon for domestic matters insisted, in his first day-long appearance at the tele-

Excerpts from the testimony
are on Pages 27 and 28.

vised Watergate hearings, that Mr. Nixon had been thwarted in his "continued effort" to give the nation a "full, factual account" of the conspiracy.

In bitter terms and occasional asides, Mr. Ehrlichman asserted that John W. Dean 3d, the former White House legal counsel who is the Senate committee's star witness against the President, had misled the White House about the Watergate burglary and its cover-up.

Initiated Wiretaps

Mr. Ehrlichman declared that both he and the President were convinced there had been nothing illegal in the activities of a secret White House intelligence unit whose members burglarized the office of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg's former psychiatrist in 1971 as part of a "national security" mission.

He conceded initiating national security wiretaps in addition to those already disclosed but maintained that he could not discuss them.

He conceded being aware soon after the burglary June 17, 1972, at the Democratic party's Watergate headquarters, that funds were being assembled for the criminal defendants. But he insisted that his understanding had been that the fund-raising effort was no more unusual than public subscription campaigns in behalf of Dr. Ellsberg in the Pen-

agon papers' trial or for defendants in other celebrated conspiracy cases.

Disagrees With Ervin

Mr. Ehrlichman quarreled with Samuel Dash, the Senate panel's chief counsel. He "respectfully" disagreed with Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., Democrat of North Carolina, the committee chairman. He resorted, in reply to several direct questions, to the explanation that he could not recall cover-up incidents alleged to have involved him.

From the moment that the combative Mr. Ehrlichman thrust his right arm high in the air to assent to the oath as a witness, he adhered to the tone that he set in a 30-page prepared statement casting Mr. Dean as the cover-up culprit, accusing the Senators of suffering a "shrinkage of perspective" and blaming the news media for spreading "falsities and misunderstandings."

Mr. Ehrlichman's interrogators, allied with an audience that applauded Senator Ervin frequently and laughed at a number of Mr. Ehrlichman's assertions, responded in kind.

Mr. Dash prodded the witness, more than once, to avoid "anticipating my questions" and Senator Ervin, his eyebrows arching into dubious ex-

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pressions, cast his insinuations in phrases bordering on scorn.

The tone was illustrated in one exchange with Senator Ervin late in the day.

"Are we to believe," the Senator asked mockingly, that the Committee for the Re-election of the President was "an eleemosynary institution that gave \$45,000 to burglars simply because it felt sorry for them?"

Unruffled by the applause and laughter, the question evoked in the crowded hearing room, Mr. Ehrlichman calmly replied in his strong voice and self-assured manner, "I'm afraid that I'm not your best witness on that, Senator."

Did the President's campaign associates believe in financially supporting the causes of burglary and wiretapping? Senator Ervin wondered aloud.

"No, sir," the witness said. "I didn't contribute a nickel."

First Day as Witness

By the end of Mr. Ehrlichman's opening day at the wit-

ness table, the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities had barely begun to interrogate him about the charges lodged against him by Mr. Dean and other witnesses.

any detail the allegations that Mr. Ehrlichman sought a guarantee of Presidential clemency for E. Howard Hunt Jr., a convicted Watergate conspirator, or that Mr. Ehrlichman helped map a cover-up effort last February at meetings in La Costa, Calif.

Much of the day was taken up with a minute and quarrelsome examination of Mr. Ehrlichman's role and motives in supervising the White House "Plumbers" unit set up in 1971 to try to plug leaks of Government secrets.

"So there came a time when you were administering an investigative unit?" Mr. Dash asked.

"Yes, in a literal sense, that is true," Mr. Ehrlichman answered.

"Literal sense?" the chief counsel asked.

"Yes, sir," the witness responded.

"Not in an actual sense?" Mr. Dash countered.

"Well," said Mr. Ehrlichman, "here I am dueling with a professor."

"I am not dueling with you," said Mr. Dash.

"Professor, if you say actual, it is actual," Mr. Ehrlichman retorted with a wry grin.

Mr. Ehrlichman contended in his opening statement that he was eager to "set the record straight" on both legitimate and spurious issues raised by the Senate investigators. He listed 15 sets of questions that he said he looked forward to answering, but spent 45 minutes reading instead a denunciation of the "gallery pleasing" charges of Mr. Dean, who said that the President had been paranoid about domestic dissent and the White House had been consumed with Watergate.

Dean View Assailed

"Mr. Dean's explanation [of the atmosphere in which Watergate had its genesis] is simply that we were all suffering from some advanced form of neurosis, and nothing else—some strange White House madness," Mr. Ehrlichman said, his brows furrowed and his head rocking to and fro. "He suggests he was the only sane one in the bunch."

Mr. Ehrlichman went on to declare that the President and his associates had been concerned that civil strife—firebombings and antiwar marches—would upset delicate diplomatic initiatives.

He volunteered the view that the bombings and demonstrations were serious enough as isolated events. But "taken as part of an apparent campaign to force upon the President a foreign policy favorable to the North Vietnamese and their allies," he said, "these demon-

strations were more than just a garden variety exercise in the First Amendment."

Terms Stakes High

The international stakes were high, Mr. Ehrlichman said, and the President gave the civil strife "balanced attention." But, he added:

"From close observation, I can testify that he is not paranoid, weird, psychotic on the subject of demonstrators or hypersensitive to criticism. He is an able, tough, international politician—practical, complex, able to integrate many diverse elements and to see the interrelationships of minute and apparently disassociated particles of information and events."

Senator Ervin sat with his gnarled right hand propping up his jowled face during the long recitation by Mr. Ehrlichman.

The witness, his arms outstretched in expansive gestures, and his word aimed more, it seemed, at the television audience than the Senators, gave a detailed civics lecture on the duties and burdens of the Presidency to counter Mr. Dean's single statement that Watergate "was probably the major thing that was occurring" in the White House in the three months after the break-in last year.

You need a clearer picture than you've had so far of what

was really going on at the White House," Mr. Ehrlichman explained as he recited the chronology of Mr. Nixon's journeys to China and the Soviet Union, his domestic policy initiatives and his reliance on his subordinates to carry out the broad-gauge policies he set.

"I do not suggest that we were all just too busy to have noticed" the Watergate conspiracy, Mr. Ehrlichman said. But he added that the White House had relied on Mr. Dean for "complete and accurate information" and that a "chain of delegation" of responsibility "is only as strong as its weakest link."

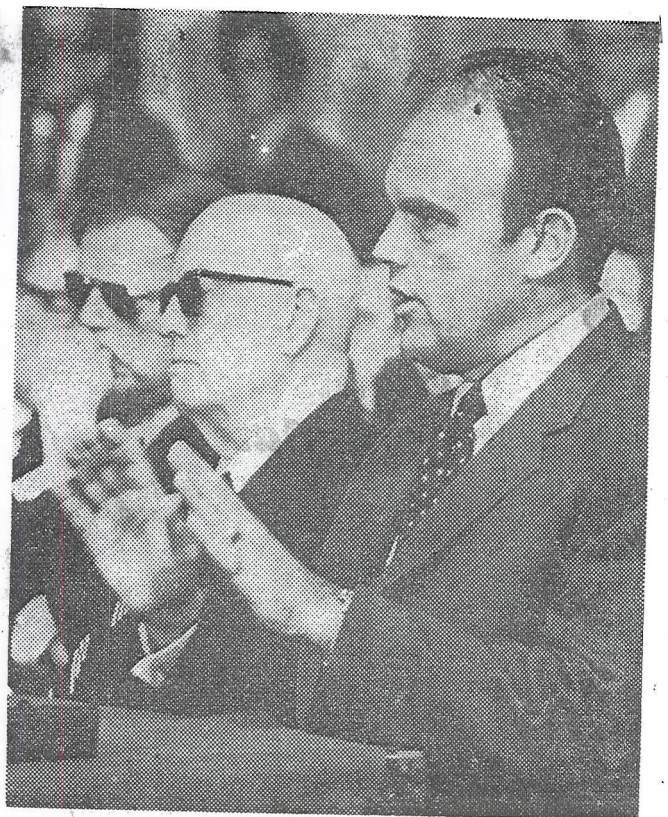
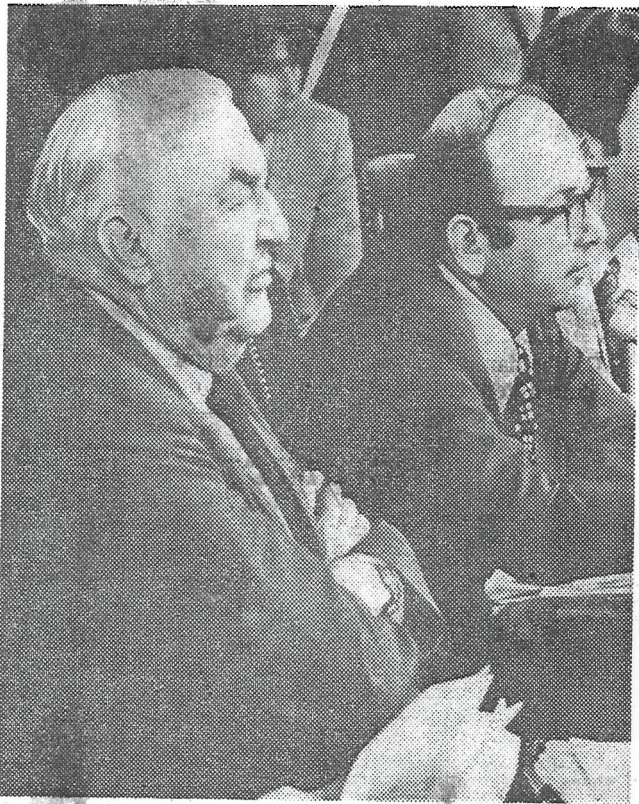
Countering Mr. Dean's declaration that he had been blocked from access to the President by the protective wall erected by H. R. Haldeman, the former White House chief of staff, and Mr. Ehrlichman, the witness said that Mr. Dean well knew the best route to the President's desk was a memorandum.

When Mr. Ehrlichman came to the portion of his prepared statement in which he described the "very busy time" that burdened the senior White House aides in 1972, he added, in a brusque aside:

"John Dean, on the other hand, never found things so quiet. And he planned the most expensive honeymoon in the history of the White House staff."

Denial of Cover-Up

The reference was to Mr. Dean's admission that he had



Photographs for The New York Times by MIKE LIEN

Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr. and Samuel Dash listen to John D. Ehrlichman. With him is John J. Wilson, lawyer.

borrowed \$4,850 of re-election campaign cash to go on a honeymoon last October. He later repaid the money.

"Let's be clear," Mr. Ehrlichman said at one point. "I did not cover up anything to do with Watergate."

Later in the day he told Fred D. Thompson, the committee's chief Republican counsel, "I didn't run around trying to bribe anybody. I didn't run around trying to destroy documents."

But the panel appeared skeptical of the former Presidential aide's professions of innocence and lack of awareness of the cover-up.

Mr. Ehrlichman testified that the 55-minute private meeting he had with President Nixon on June 20, 1972, three days after the Watergate break-in, was devoted almost solely to a discussion of welfare reform and other domestic proposals then before Congress.

Appears Dumbfounded

Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee, the senior Republican on the committee, said, in the terms of one seemingly dumbfounded at the statement, that he would think he would be "determined to find out what happened" at Watergate had he been present at such a meeting. "This sounds, he added, "like a routine staff operation."

But such statements failed to produce any change in Mr. Ehrlichman's account.



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Fred D. Thompson, minority counsel, and Senator Howard J. Baker Jr., committee vice chairman, listening to the testimony of John D. Ehrlichman.