



John Mitchell and his attorney before the House Judiciary Committee. By Joe Heiberger—The Washington Post

## Mitchell: 'Stonewall' for Panel

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John N. Mitchell answered two questions before the House Judiciary Committee yesterday in the way President Nixon's lawyer had hoped. Otherwise, he contributed virtually nothing to the impeachment inquiry, most members said.

Rep. Tom Railsback (R-Ill.) said, "Mitchell personifies the stonewall" after a day-long closed session of questioning the former Attorney General, who is under indictment for alleged involvement in the Watergate cover-up. "Stonewall" was a word introduced into the language by the Nixon White

House — its meaning: tell them nothing.

Mitchell did not invoke the Fifth Amendment by refusing to answer questions on grounds they might incriminate him. But to many questions he replied that he couldn't remember, committee members said.

Mitchell was specific on one point, members agreed. That was that H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, then White House chief of staff, did not mention payment of money to Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr., when he telephoned Mitchell in New York on March 21, 1973. The hope of getting this response was the principal reason that Mr. Nixon's lawyer, James D. St. Clair had asked the com-

mittee to call Mitchell as a witness.

Haldeman had just attended an Oval Office meeting where John W. Dean III, then White House counsel, had told the President of payments of hush money to Watergate defendants and said more was needed to prevent Hunt from blackmailing the White House. The President at one point said, "For Christ's sake, get it."

St. Clair has focused his defense of the President against impeachment on the Watergate cover-up, trying to convince the committee that Mr. Nixon was not involved in the payments and further that any made were

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for legal fees, not to buy silence.

The purpose of getting this statement from Mitchell was to try to show that Haldeman had not passed on instructions from the President to pay off Hunt.

That same day, Frederick C. LaRue of the Committee for the Re-election of the President, had been told by Dean of Hunt's demand for more money and had talked by telephone with Mitchell, former director of the committee, to ask whether he should pay it.

Mitchell reportedly said that if the money was for legal fees he would advise LaRue to pay it. That evening \$75,000 was delivered to Hunt's lawyer, who said he turned the unopened package over to Hunt.

Mitchell reportedly told the committee that to the best of his recollection he talked with LaRue before he received the call from Haldeman. St. Clair hoped this would show that the decision to pay Hunt had already been made, regardless of what Haldeman told him.

St. Clair sets great store by the sequence of these and other phone calls. But several members questioned its importance in view of the transcripts of the Nixon-Dean taped conversation in which the President made several statements which appeared to endorse buying Hunt's silence.

Rep. Walter Flowers (D-Ala.), considered the committee Democrat least likely to vote for impeachment, said Mitchell testified that he believed he talked to LaRue before Haldeman, but added: "I'm not sure its all that important because I'm not sure you have to tie anything to that sequence."

Rep. Charles Wiggins (R-Calif.), a strong defender of the President, acknowledged that the timing of the Mitchell-LaRue conversation still did not settle the question of whether the President joined the alleged cover-up conspiracy on March 21 when he was told of Hunt's demands.

The issue, Wiggins said, boils down to what the President's "state of mind" was. "We've got to make a finding of just what the President intended on March 21 and that's more than just a question of the payment of money," Wiggins said.

Rep. James Mann (D-S.C.), another conservative Democrat, told newsmen he thought the many differences between the committee's transcripts and the White House versions

of the taped conversations were "significant." Just how significant, he added, "will be revealed by my vote" on impeachment later this month.

Rep. George Danielson (D-Calif.) called Mitchell's testimony "a waste of time. On everything critical, he could not recall. It's like a handful of smoke, you can't get hold of it. Nothing he has given us is new, startling, different or helpful."

Mitchell had asked that his testimony be limited to the Hunt payment on March 21 and of his relationship with the President. But committee members refused to waive their rights to ask questions covering a broader scale, such as setting up the intelligence-gathering plan which led to the Watergate break-in. Mitchell has denied that he approved the plan while head of the re-election committee or

had any advance knowledge of it.

Haldeman, also indicted in the Watergate cover-up, was not called by the committee after his lawyer sent word that Haldeman would refuse to testify on Fifth Amendment grounds.



United Press International

John Mitchell during Judiciary Committee recess with Chairman Peter Rodino.

Today the committee will question Dean. St. Clair requested that he be called in hopes that Dean would state that he called LaRue with Hunt's money demand before meeting with the President, and that the President did not direct that payments be made to Hunt after hearing Dean's recital of the cover-up and alleged blackmail threats.

Meanwhile, the president of National Public Radio asked the committee to release the presidential tapes for public broadcast.

Lee Frischknecht wrote to Chairman Peter W. Rodino Jr. (D-N.J.), "What better way for the public to get an accurate version of the discussion?"

National Public Radio is the only nationwide noncommercial radio network. Its 167 stations serve 42 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia.