

U.S. Hints Blackmail as Motive in Watergate Case

WASHINGTON, Jan. 18 (UPI) — The Government publicly suggested for the first time today that blackmail was a motive behind the alleged bugging of Democratic national headquarters last summer by Republican-financed agents.

The chief prosecutor, Earl J. Silbert, made the suggestion at a Federal appeals court hearing on whether conversations secretly monitored from the wiretapped telephones of high Democratic officials could be admitted as evidence in the Watergate trial.

Mr. Silbert argued that the jury could tell by the type of phone conversations monitored that the eavesdroppers were interested in "political intelligence."

Judge David L. Bazelon, chief judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, asked: "Is the Government interested in

whether this information would be used to compromise these people? That is a euphemism for blackmail."

"We think it is highly relevant to lay a factual foundation so that we can suggest that is what they were interested in," Mr. Silbert replied. "Why else would a wiretapper be interested in — when they were doing some political wiretapping — be interested in information that was personal and of a confidential and private nature?"

"Why don't you indict them for it?" Judge Bazelon asked.

"We believe this information goes to the motive and intent. It is relative to the motive and intent of the parties involved," Mr. Silbert said.

The trial of the remaining defendants, G. Gordon Liddy and James W. McCord Jr. was stalled yesterday to permit Democratic lawyers to appeal

the ruling or the trial judge, John J. Sirica, that testimony about the monitored conversations was admissible.

Mr. Liddy, a former White House aide and financial counsel to President Nixon's reelection campaign committee, and Mr. McCord, then chief of security for the committee, are charged with conspiracy, burglary and illegal wiretapping and eavesdropping.

A former White House consultant, E. Howard Hunt Jr., and four men arrested with Mr. McCord inside Democratic headquarters at the Watergate last June 17 have pleaded guilty.

The Government's star witness is a former Federal Bureau of Investigation agent, Alfred C. Baldwin 3d, who has testified that Mr. McCord hired him to monitor tapped phone lines at Democratic headquarters. Mr. Baldwin said that he had

overheard more than 200 conversations of R. Spencer Oliver, director of the Democratic State Chairmen's Association.

Rights of Privacy Cited

Lawyers for the eavesdropping victims objected to disclosure of the contents of the conversations on the ground that their clients' rights of privacy would be violated.

Mr. Silbert argued before the three-judge appeals court panel that Mr. Baldwin's testimony was vital to the Government's case and that the jury would make a "moral judgment" about why the wiretaps had been installed.

"Do you want to show how dirty this thing was?" Judge Bazelon asked. "You're talking about morality."

"We feel we shouldn't be limited to a bare-bones case. This is necessary to escape acquittal," Mr. Silbert replied.

"You're saying that the jury won't think it's a crime just to intercept a message?" Judge Bazelon asked, "that there has to be something deeper than that — that there has to be something dirtier than that? I don't know. Maybe you're right."

"We think that," Mr. Silbert said. "If there is technical wiretapping, you're right. The jury does that or make a moral judgment."

Mr. Silbert said the prosecution did not intend to bring out "specific details of an conversations," but did intend to ask Mr. Baldwin the "general nature of what he overheard."

Mr. Baldwin, of Hamden, Conn., who has been promised immunity from prosecution in exchange for his crucial testimony, was due to retake the stand when the trial resumed.