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Blackmail as An Issue in Bugging Trial

Washington

The prosecutor in the Watergate trial said yesterday that blackmail may have been part of the reason for wiretaps planted by Republican agents in Democratic headquarters.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Earl J. Silbert, arguing in appeals court for admission of wiretap evidence in the district court trial of James W. McCord Jr. and J. Gordon Liddy, was asked by one of the judges:

"Is the Government interested in whether this information would be used to compromise these people? That is a euphemism for blackmail."

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

The Watergate trial was abruptly halted Wednesday when a witness, Alfred C. Baldwin III, testified he was told by McCord to listen for such conversations.

After a protest from an attorney representing some of the people whose conversations were monitored, Judge John J. Sirica said that the testimony could be admitted and the attorney, Charles W. Morgan Jr., appealed to the higher court.

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