

courts

Many Watergate Motives

"I CASED the situation thoroughly, and I'm good at it. I appraised the risk as very high and the potential return as very low. I recommended against it, but it wasn't my decision. I can tell you this: if it had been a CIA operation and I'd been in charge, it never would have happened."

That was the high point of an interview which E. Howard Hunt Jr. gave to Time magazine after having pled guilty to conspiracy in the bugging and burgling of the National Democratic headquarters in the Watergate office - apartment complex in Washington, D.C., on June 17, 1972.

Hunt allegedly had also persuaded (successfully) four other defendants in the Watergate case to plead guilty. There also were allegations — never yet confirmed — that Hunt had "promised his four confederates that unidentified 'friends' would offer each defendant up to \$1000 for every month spent in prison with more money to be paid at the time of his release."

'Mitchell Wants It'

Without naming any source, Time magazine a week ago had also declared that it was Hunt who had talked his friends (who had worked with him in the 1961 Bay of Pigs fiasco in Cuba) into undertaking the Watergate bugging by telling them: "It's got to be done. My friend Colson wants it. Mitchell wants it."

The Colson was identified as Charles W. Colson, now counsel to President Nixon, and Mitchell as former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, who at the time headed the Committee for the Reelection of the President.

Hunt's lawyer, William Bittman, immediately declared that his client "categorically and emphatically denies" the Time story. Mitchell also denied there was any truth to the story.

Thus the search for the real motive behind the bugging episode — which everyone admitted took place — continued and led in several directions.

'Men of Honor'

On conservative commentator William F. Buckley Jr.'s "Firing Line" show last Sunday exiled Cuban lawyer Mario Lazo extolled the Watergate Seven as "men of honor — patriots, who should be decorated."

Hunt, who appeared with Lazo on the show, was called "one of the greatest men of our time" by Lazo. The Cuban lawyer arrived at that conclusion because, he said, there was fear

among anti - Castroites that Democratic candidate Senator George McGovern would recognize Cuba diplomatically if elected President.

"There were many reports, but no proof, that a lot of Communist money was going into McGovern's campaign. So the group conducted an honorable, patriotic operation to get information," said Lazo.

Hunt refused to say anything about Watergate except that he had pleaded guilty.

On the Tapes

Meanwhile, Assistant U.S. Attorney Earl J. Silbert, who was still trying to convict the two men who had not pleaded guilty, appeared in a Washington Court of Appeals. He wanted made public the information contained on the tapes made during the wiretap.

Silbert argued it was necessary to disclose what was on the tapes in order to fix the motives of James W.

fficial, could not be admitted in evidence. To do so, decided the court, would "frustrate the purpose of Congress in making wiretapping a crime."

Star Witness

Meanwhile, in the court of Judge Sirica, Baldwin continued to testify about monitoring the wiretap. Baldwin, the government's star witness, recalled that he once sent information derived from the bugging to an official of the Committee for the Re-election of the President. But he couldn't recall who the official was.

He recalled, too, that he had shouted warnings over a walkie - talkie to the five men whom police arrested in the act of bugging, but he was too late. "They've got us," Baldwin heard someone say in reply.

Still another possible motive was offered by McCord's lawyer, Gerald Alch. His client, Alch admitted freely, had conspired to



AP Wirephoto

HUNT



AP Wirephoto

BALDWIN

McCord Jr., security coordinator for President Nixon's reelection campaign, and G. Gordon Liddy, financial counsel to the reelection committee.

Asked 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 replied: "We think it is highly relevant. . . . Why else would a wiretapper be interested — when they were doing some political wiretapping — be interested in information that was personal and private and confidential in nature?"

However, the court finally ruled 2-to-1 that the actual contents of conversations monitored by FBI agent Alfred C. Baldwin III on the tapped telephone of R. Spencer Oliver, a Democratic of-

bug and burgle Watergate (McCord was one of the five caught in the act), but he was not guilty because he did it under "duress."

The duress, said Alch, was the (alleged) threat by forces close to the Democrats to attack President Nixon and other Republicans violently.

At midweek, Time's story about Mitchell at least got some confirmation. Witness Hugh Sloan Jr., former treasurer of President Nixon's re-election campaign, said he gave a total of \$199,000 in cash to Liddy.

Before doing so, however, he had checked with Mitchell and former Secretary of Commerce Maurice Stans on whether the President's deputy campaign director Jeb Magruder had the right to authorize the handing over of the cash. They okayed the payments to Liddy, Sloan testified.