

FEDERAL INQUIRY ON SEGRETTI IS ON

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Justice Department Looks
Into His Campaign Role
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WASHINGTON, Feb. 11—The Justice Department has begun an investigation of Donald H. Segretti, the young California lawyer who allegedly directed a political sabotage effort on behalf of the Republican party during last year's Presidential campaign.

Officials of the Justice Department's Criminal Division had said as recently as three weeks ago that they believed, on the basis of interviews with Mr. Segretti last summer, that his activities were probably legal and did not merit a full investigation.

An Administration source confirmed today, however, that the department's fraud unit was now looking into the possibility that Mr. Segretti might have violated a Federal statute that makes it illegal to print or distribute political literature that is unsigned or that bears the unauthorized signature of a candidate or political group.

It was not learned why the Justice Department, which knew about Mr. Segretti as early as last July, had waited until now to begin a formal investigation.

Attracted by Calls

The Federal Bureau of Investigation was initially led to Mr. Segretti through a number of long distance calls placed his telephone from phones in the home and office of E. Howard Hunt Jr., a former White House consultant who recently pleaded guilty to charges of conspiring to tap telephones in the Democratic party's Watergate offices.

A number of Mr. Segretti's friends and acquaintances have said that he asked them in late 1971 or early last year to act as informants for the Republicans while posing as campaign workers for various Democratic Presidential candidates, or to assist him in otherwise disrupting the Democrats' efforts.

Since all of those who have reported being approached by Mr. Segretti have denied accepting his offers, it is not known precisely what sort of operation, if any, was conducted by him.

Justice Department officials would not say which of his activities were being looked into or whether any evidence of wrongdoing had been uncovered.

The New York Times reported last week that Dwight L. Chapin, President Nixon's appointments secretary, had told the F.B.I. that he directed Herbert W. Kalmsbach, the President's personal attorney, to pay Mr. Segretti for his part in the alleged sabotage operation. Other reports have put the sum involved as high as \$35,000.

Reported Asked To Leave

Mr. Chapin, a classmate of Mr. Segretti's at the University of Southern California in the early 1960's, has reportedly been asked to leave the White House staff because of newspaper reports naming him as Mr. Segretti's contact in the Administration.

Indicates No Call

One Congressional source, told of the Justice Department investigation, speculated that the Nixon Administration might be planning to use it as an excuse not to turn over certain investigative files to a special Senate committee set up last week to look into the Watergate bugging case and the alleged sabotage operation.

But a Federal official said, as far he knew, the Government still intended to keep its pledge to cooperate fully with the committee, which will be headed by Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., Democrat of North Carolina.

Mr. Segretti was called before a Federal grand jury last summer. But he was not indicted nor did his name come up at the recent criminal trial in which five men pleaded guilty and two were convicted of bugging the Democrats' headquarters in late May and early June of last year.

Earl J. Silbert, the principal assistant United States attorney here who was in charge of the prosecution at the trial, indicated last week that, based on the Justice Department's determination that Mr. Segretti had violated no laws, he would probably not be called before a renewed grand jury inquiry into the Watergate case.