

Talks About 'A Scheme'

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Daniel Ellsberg charged yesterday that his prosecution in the Pentagon Papers case was "part of a scheme" to re-elect President Nixon.

He put the blame on what he called "the conspiratorial apparatus" that the Nixon administration inherited and that Ellsberg said had once even subtly corrupted him.

"It would be foolish suppose that only individuals are involved," Ellsberg told a panel of Senate subcommittees headed by Senator Edmund S. Muskie (Dem-Maine). "It is the system that has gone awry."

Muskie's panel is investigating the government's security system.

Freed of the charges against him last week because of government misconduct ranging from burglary to wiretapping, Ellsberg acknowledged that his conclusion of a link between his own prosecution and the political espionage behind the Watergate scandal was circumstantial.

But he repeatedly noted that Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt — whom the White House hired shortly after Ellsberg had been

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first indicted — kept popping up in clandestine operations designed not only to discredit him but Democratic presidential candidates as well.

Ellsberg charged that Hunt's real assignment, in trying to "smear me," was to find out whether Ellsberg could be turned into "a mud ball that would stick to a (Democratic) presidential candidate."

Noting that at the time Muskie was leading President Nixon in some opinion

polls, Ellsberg said the administration hoped "to establish a link between me and the Democratic candidates, specifically you, Mr. Muskie."

Ellsberg outlined a chilling "world of secrecy" within the government: Secret reading rooms, each as big as the main room of the New York Public Library, behind nondescript doors at the Pentagon; four-star generals serving as secret couriers, and super-secret documents so tightly held that even the classification stamps on the pages are classified far above "top secret."

"I lived in a world of secrets for 12 years," Ellsberg said of his government service which ended as a special assistant to the secretary of defense during the Johnson administration. "I thought I was above the law."

In that vein, Ellsberg recalled having documents in his Pentagon safe during the 1964-65 debate on Vietnam that would have shown that "two cabinet secretaries [Dean Rusk and Robert McNamara] were lying directly to Senate committees in executive session." Instead of speaking up, Ellsberg said, "I kept my mouth shut."

Government secrecy, Ellsberg charged, has become so pervasive that there are some 20 classifications "above top secret."

"Secrecy corrupts just as power corrupts," Ellsberg said, recalling how he tried to warn White House adviser Henry Kissinger of what could happen to him. It was in December of 1968 at the Hotel Pierre in New York City, Ellsberg said, and "I wanted perhaps to inoculate him."

Describing his own past

experiences, Ellsberg said only "the elect" at the Pentagon, for example, know of entire document rooms there behind safe doors, each with a special guard armed with computerized lists, updated daily of who may enter.

With four or five of these separate clearances, Ellsberg said, "You become aware that there is no limit to this." He said there could "even be clearances the president doesn't know about."

"I don't say that's the case in Watergate," Ellsberg said. "I don't believe it is. The president likely knows all those details. But could it be withheld from him? The answer is yes."

Of all the above-top-secret clearances, Ellsberg said, "the lowest" is called COMINT (Communication Intercept) data such as that gained from a wiretap). He estimated that about 120,000 people, all in the executive branch, have that clearance — in contrast to the 400,000 to 500,000 who have "top secret" clearance.

"The next clearance above that (COMINT)" he said, "cuts way down — to about 14,000 to 20,000 — a large number but still a small portion of the electorate."

Besides encouraging the noting that those outside the government "priesthood" have no right to make decisions, Ellsberg said, the system makes it "your duty to lie" when asked about the information.

Ellsberg accused Kissinger of doing just that in telling newsmen in June of 1971 — when the Pentagon papers were first reported in the New York Times — that he hadn't read the papers until then.

"That was a lie," Ellsberg charged. He recalled meeting with Kissinger at San Clemente in 1969, about a year after their talk at the Hotel Pierre, and urging him to read the papers and "to learn" from them. Ellsberg said Kissinger told him then that "yes, he had read the Pentagon papers . . . he said, 'but we make decisions very differently now.'"