

Podell Pleads Not Guilty in Bribe Case

Arnold H. Lubasch

Representative Bertram L. Podell of Brooklyn pleaded not guilty yesterday to charges that he had accepted \$41,350 in bribes to try to obtain an air route to the Bahamas for a Florida airline.

After denying all the charges against him in Federal Court here, Mr. Podell accused President Nixon of "political extortion" and a "concerted attempt to get me" in retaliation for his opposition to the President's policies in Congress.

The 47-year-old Democratic Representative told newsmen in the courthouse that "a State Department lobbyist" had solicited his vote last year for the President's position on a key bill about the removal of American troops from Indochina.

Mr. Podell said that the votes of "other Democratic liberals" had not been solicited on this bill and that he had apparently been singled out because he was under investigation in the airline case and might be susceptible to pressure.

'Political Extortion' Seen

The Congressman, who said that his opposition to President Nixon's policy on Vietnam had been well known at the time, identified the State Department man who allegedly solicited his vote as Thomas W. Fina and quoted him as having said that "the President wants to know who his friends are."

"I consider this an attempt at political extortion by the President," Mr. Podell said, adding outside the courthouse moments later that it was "the rawest attempt at political extortion" and that he had rejected it.

Mr. Fina could not be reached immediately for comment.

In another accusation, Mr. Podell said that his apartment and his office in Washington had been broken into about two years ago, that papers relating to the airline case had been taken from the office's files and that his Manhattan law office at 160 Broadway had been broken into a few weeks ago by persons apparently seeking information.

"I don't know if the President personally ordered them," Mr. Podell said, but he added that "the President should find out who is responsible."

"I wonder if the plumbers are still plumbing," he quipped,



Associated Press

Bertram L. Podell

in a reference to a group of White House intelligence operators called the Plumbers who were mentioned in the Senate's Watergate hearings.

Mr. Podell said that each of the burglaries of his apartment and offices had been reported to the police.

Burglary Reported

In Sashington, the police said that Mr. Podell's apartment was reported burglarized in July, 1971, and that a watch, cufflinks and \$200 in cash were reported missing in what appeared to be "a routine burglary."

The police added that they had no record of any burglary at Mr. Podell's Congressional office and that the Representative had not reported it, but they did not rule out the possibility that someone else might have reported it.

A police spokesman in New York said that a break-in had been reported at Mr. Podell's law office here on July 11 and that an investigation was being conducted.

The Federal indictment that was filed here against Mr. Podell on July 12 charged him with conspiracy, bribery and conflict of interest dating to 1968 in an unsuccessful attempt to pressure Federal agencies into granting a Bahama route to Florida Atlantic Airlines.

The other defendants in the indictment are Herbert S. Podell, the Congressman's brother and law partner, and

Martin Miller, former president of the defunct airline's parent corporation, Leasing Consultants, Inc.

Representative Podell was also charged with perjury for his testimony to the grand jury that investigated the allegations that the airline had bribed the Congressman.

All three defendants pleaded not guilty to the charges and were without bail to await trial before Judge Robert L. Carter in Federal Court here.

As he left the courthouse, the Congressman declared that the charges were completely false and that he would win vindication in a trial, adding that, "I've never accepted a bribe in my life — and I never, never will."