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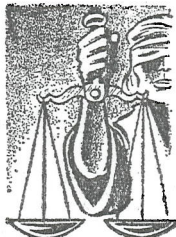
Judge Sirica and The President

Washington

WHEN JOHN J. SIRICA was growing up in Waterbury, Conn., his father, an immigrant from the small southern Italian town of Valentino, used to say to him, "I don't care what you do, John, but be somebody."

Because of Watergate, Sirica was well on his way to being somebody before last Wednesday. Now with his order to Richard Nixon, "respondent," to bring documents into court he is firmly fixed in the history books.

What kind of a somebody he is has stirred arguments for the last six months. His critics from right and left contend that "Maximum John" Sirica is as preposterous a liberal idol as chairman Sam Ervin of the Watergate committee whose civil rights record is a disgrace. But Sirica, like Ervin, has proved to be for a distracted country a man for this season.



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SIRICA IS 69. His wavy black hair is brushed straight back from his wide face. The pupils of his brown eyes are ringed in black, adding to the sternness of his air. He is regarded as a holy terror by defendants, and his harsh sentencing procedures are notorious.

For Richard Nixon, one of the many paradoxes of his present plight is that the man who has brought him maximum trouble in Watergate is a man who seems to be so like him.

Sirica is, for instance, a strict law-and-order man. He is as arbitrary in his courtroom as Nixon is in the White House. They both came up the hard way. But Sirica, unlike the President, is a humble man, who still marvels at the opportunities that put him on the federal bench and who never forgets where he came from.

Sirica is somewhat amused at the adulation that has come to him so late in life. He readily identifies himself as a conservative Republican, and he is, in fact, so hard-nosed that the late Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy once offered him a job as chief counsel of his infamous Government Operations Committee.

Sirica was tempted — McCarthy was a good friend — but as a new family man, he decided it was better to stay on with the firm of Hogan and Hartson. Besides, he was not sure he could restrain the fiery Red-baiter, a fear that was to prove well-grounded.

"Divine Providence guided me away from that one," says Sirica, a devout man who obviously feels a higher hand had put him in the midst of Watergate.

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THE LATEST DEVELOPMENT — the order to the President — was inevitable. Sirica's curiosity was amply demonstrated through the first trial. He is visibly eager to learn all the things that Nixon so carefully kept himself from finding out.

It was always that way with Sirica. Almost 30 years ago, he served as chief counsel to a select House committee investigating the broadcast industry. The members at a critical point pulled back from following the leads into a network with administration ties.

Sirica quit, saying, "I don't want it on my conscience that anyone can say that John Sirica, a resident of the District of Columbia for many years, is party to a whitewash."