

Capitol Punishment

No Hangin' Matters, Just Your Everyday Capital Crimes

By Art Buchwald

This has probably been the greatest year in history for criminal lawyers. Thanks to the Watergate fallout, every law firm in this city is now on a 24-hour, seven-day-week schedule. Whereas most law offices were se-date, quiet places, they now resemble brokeragé offices with everyone screaming into the phones.

I stopped in to see a friend of mine who works for one of the top criminal law firms in Washington. He had his coat off, his shirt open at the collar, his tie askew and he was writing furiously on a yellow pad. He motioned for me to sit down. Then he yelled into the phone, "Right, I got you. Forty-three indictments in Jersey. We'll take them. Tell them to put the money in the bank." He hung up.

"Boy, what a day," he told me. "I just . . ." The phone rang.

"Yeah . . . Yeah . . . We take perjury. How many cases you got? . . . 15 . . . Grand Jury or Senate? . . . Both . . . Okay . . . Send them over. No, not today . . . We can't see them for two weeks . . . You can't wait that long? . . . So get yourself another lawyer." He hung up.

"You really must be doing well to turn away business."

"Every time someone gets indicted he wants to see his lawyer *right* away. They'll call back. Most law firms have a one-month waiting list for perjurers."

My friend's secretary came in. "Mr. McIntosh, we have a mayor outside who is being indicted for income tax evasion."

"Tell him we don't take mayors anymore. You have to be either a president of a corporation or a high official of the administration."

A law partner rushed in. "We've been offered 300 bribery cases in Baltimore County. Should we take it?"

"Take 200," my friend shouted. "We can't put all our eggs in bribery."

"What price should I quote?"

"One hundred thousand a case in advance, \$200,000 before we go to trial. Vote fraud is \$50,000 extra."

"Wow," I said. "You people are really raking in the money."

"Watergate's been very good to us," my friend said. "You know before Watergate all we got were a lot of priests and students being indicted by the government. Most of them didn't have a dime. But now you're getting a much higher class of defendant. They come from the best families, they went to the best schools and they all have short hair. Most of the people being indicted these days are lawyers, so you don't have to explain things to them twice. I tell you it's a pleasure doing business with them."

The phone rang. He picked it up. "Oh hi, Buzz. You offering us 43 kickback cases in New York? Sure, we'll take them if your law firm doesn't want them . . . I see you have 63 judges coming up for trial . . . Look, while I have you on the phone, would you take 33 wire-tapping trials in Los Angeles? We just don't have the troops to send to L.A. . . . Thanks a lot. . . ."

The secretary came back in. "There's a delegation of ex-White House aides to see you. They say it's very important."

"Send them to the White House department down on the second floor."

Another law partner came in. "You interested in a former Attorney General and a former Secretary of Commerce?"

"Good God," my friend said in exasperation, "I've only got two hands."

The phone buzzed. He picked it up. "Oh, yes sir, Mr. Vice President. Uh, uh . . . uh . . . Yes, I've been reading about it in the newspapers . . . I see . . . Well we usually don't handle Vice Presidents, but we might make an exception in your case . . . Now could you start at the beginning. . . ."

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