

An Independent Attorney General

Elliot Lee Richardson

10-12-73
NYT

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 11— It may have been with a feeling of déjà vu that Elliot Lee Richardson orchestrated the prosecution of Spiro Agnew for cheating on his income taxes. Twelve years ago, the handsome, 6-foot Attorney General for the state of Massachusetts initiated the prosecution of Bernard Goldfine, the influence peddler who stained the Eisenhower Administration.

Sherman Adams, the No. 2 man in the White House in 1961, was forced to resign his post under heavy political and public pressures when it was discovered that Mr. Goldfine, a Boston financier, had bestowed rich gifts, including a vicuna coat, on Mr. Adams.

Mr. Richardson won his case, and Mr. Goldfine was sent to jail for income tax evasion.

But it was probably the Worcester case that made Mr. Richardson's reputation as the independent Boston Brahmin, an image that was to help advance his political career to the office of the Attorney General of the United States.

Thomas Worcester, the head of a large and respected engineering firm, was found guilty of writing off as business expenses bribes to get state Highway contracts. Worcester agreed to tell the state Attorney General, Mr. Richardson, and the grand jury, how and to whom the bribes had been delivered, in order to avoid jail.

After eliciting extensive information from Worcester, Mr. Richardson told the Judge that Worcester had previously been less than candid, whereupon the judge reopened the question of probation and made public Worcester's revelations—including personal references to scores of embarrassed public officials.

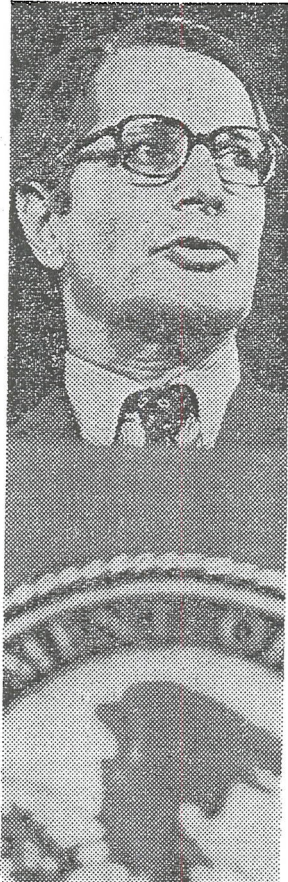
Time Out for Poetry

Even as a young man serving Justice Felix Frankfurter as a law clerk, Mr. Richardson demonstrated a brash independence. The Justice never got over Mr. Richardson's demand to have an uninterrupted hour every morning to read poetry with his co-clerk, William T. Coleman.

Mr. Richardson, a graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law School, was also a law clerk under Justice Learned Hand before he became Acting Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare in 1958 at the age of 37.

Returning to his home state—Mr. Richardson was born to a wealthy family in Boston on July 20, 1920—Mr. Richardson began his political career and was elected Attorney General and then Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts.

In 1956, President Nixon,



The New York Times

A career-long reputation for independence.

who first met Mr. Richardson in 1956 during President Eisenhower's re-election campaign, asked the Boston lawyer to transport his wife, three children and ambitions to Washington to serve as the Under Secretary of State.

During his year at the State Department, Mr. Richardson's reputation grew. He also became known as a man who could adapt to the bureaucracy.

When he learned that Secretary William P. Rogers refused to communicate with Henry Kissinger, then the President's foreign affairs adviser, Mr. Richardson grasped the opportunity to be the conduit between the State

Department and the White House, according to Mr. Richardson's staff.

Mr. Richardson also became known for his appetite for work, often arriving late at night at his suburban home in McLean, Va., and for his mastery of the details of policy.

Appetite for Work

On becoming Secretary of H.E.W. in 1970, Mr. Richardson found the department in turmoil, mainly because it had borne the brunt of pressure from the conservative policymakers of the Administration.

Mr. Richardson was given high marks for restoring order and a sense of purpose to the department, but he is also remembered as a stubborn infighter and consistent loser.

He fought hard for welfare and medical reform, but especially for busing and the cause of racial integration. Again and again, he went back to the White House, trying to reverse the staff and finally the President.

But though Mr. Richardson lost his battles, the President had come to trust the Boston aristocrat who had served him faithfully for four years, and consequently appointed him Secretary of Defense.

Only three months later, the President's need for a Defense Secretary was overshadowed by his search for a man who would quiet the public charges that the Justice Department was being less than diligent in its investigation of the Watergate break-in. In May, Mr. Richardson was named to his third Cabinet post, Attorney General, with full powers and independence over the Watergate investigation.

Mr. Richardson, a man not without Presidential aspirations, has gained a great deal of publicity with the conviction of the Vice President. But more publicity is still to come as he wrestles with the legal tangles of Watergate prosecutions and the Presidential tapes.