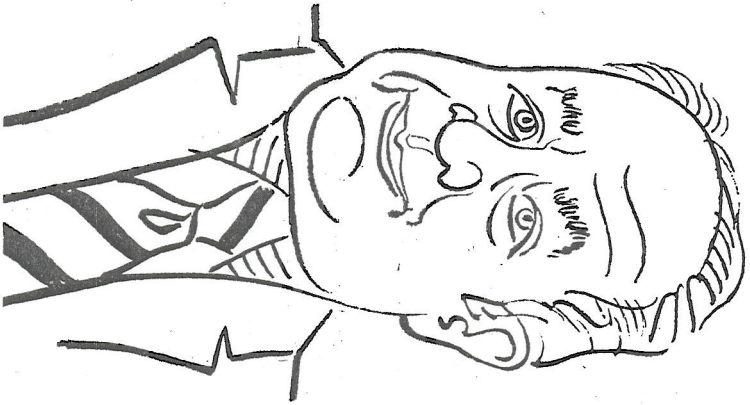


Will Leon Jaworski Investigate the Plumbers?



Leon Jaworski

By Oscar Berger

Whether President Nixon achieves any long-range objective out of his Oct. 20 Saturday night massacre may be answered in a critical decision awaiting Leon Jaworski as the new special prosecutor: Shall he press the investigation of the White House plumbers unit begun by Archibald Cox?

The desires of the White House are unmistakable. It wants Jaworski to forget about the plumbers, drop Cox's unfulfilled demands for documents concerning the plumbers and quickly get rid of the Kennedy Democrat still in charge of this investigation.

If Jaworski takes that course, the White House will, in fact, have the special prosecutor it wants. Beyond the plumbers, Nixon lieutenants want Jaworski to focus narrowly on the Watergate burglary and dismantle Cox investigations into other matters. If that results in angry resignations by Cox's task force chiefs, so much the better in the eyes of the White House. The ordeal of the Saturday night massacre will not have been in vain.

Nothing has dismayed the White House more than the aggressive investigation of the plumbers by the Cox task force under William H. Merrill, assistant chief U.S. Attorney in Detroit during the Kennedy and Johnson ad-

ministrations. Nixon aides believe Merrill's investigation of the 1971 burglary of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office intends to implicate Mr. Nixon himself. Indeed, the Merrill task force, interested in more than mere burglaries, wants to expose a pattern of illegitimate governmental powers.

Understandably, then, Cox encountered special White House resistance against supplying documents about the plumbers. As Cox testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee, his requests on Aug. 23 for a long list of such papers (including records of mysterious plumbers assignments called "Special Project No. M-1" and "Project Odessa") were ignored.

Soon after arriving here this week, Jaworski will be asked by Merrill to renew demands for these papers and subpoena them if necessary. The White House hopes he will refuse, leading to a public outburst by Merrill and either his resignation or dismissal. That, in turn, could start a chain reaction leading to the departure of Cox's entire senior staff.

"Jaworski sure as hell has the right to bring his own team on," a presidential aide told us. Other Nixon lieutenants privately regret that Mr. Nixon, having risked impeachment by firing

Cox, did not finish the job by getting rid of his task force chiefs too.

Accordingly, since Cox's departure, the White House has laid the public relations groundwork for more dismissals or forced resignations describing the special prosecutor's office as a hive of anti-Nixon partisans—particularly plumbers investigator Merrill. A onetime Democratic candidate for Congress who was Michigan chairman of Citizens for Robert Kennedy in 1968, Merrill is being painted as an implacable foe of the President.

But curtailing investigations not directly related to the Watergate burglary and disposing of Cox's holdovers would start a new storm in Congress and among the public. To counteract that, presidential aides hope Jaworski will move quickly for grand jury action in the Watergate case itself.

That probably would mean indictments of big names: John Mitchell, H. R. Haldeman, John D. Ehrlichman. The White House could argue that Leon Jaworski was cleaning up Watergate while Archie Cox had been fiddling around with irrelevancies in trying to bring down the President. Jaworski could then quietly shut down investigations of the plumbers, campaign expenditures and perhaps the ITT affair.

and stop prying into Mr. Nixon's personal finances.

Whereas Cox was named special prosecutor by then Atty. Gen. Elliot Richardson without prior White House approval, the President and his senior staff were deeply involved in Jaworski's selection. They picked a Houston corporation lawyer of unquestioned integrity but no tendency to oppose the establishment.

"Leon is impressed by power," says one prominent Texas Democrat allied with Jaworski in past campaigns. "I would think he will be terribly impressed by Mr. President in the Oval Office." He and other Texans believe Jaworski would shrink from taking the President into court to seek documents as Cox did or in pressing investigations that could personally embarrass Mr. Nixon.

But there is another aspect to Jaworski. He is a man of considerable ego, fellow lawyers in Houston report, proud of his many civic endeavors. At age 68, he will be sensitive to accusations of cover-up and could conceivably come around to the investigative course taken by Cox. If so, the White House will then have irrevocably lost all control of the Watergate prosecution.