

Caulfield Felt Fire Plot Was Sincere

By Jack Anderson

The reported White House plot to set fire to the esteemed Brookings Institution as a cover for an FBI burglary of its files, according to secret testimony, was no joke but a serious proposal from Charles Colson.

The former presidential trouble-shooter laughed off rumors earlier this year of a scheme to burn Brookings. When we told him about the sworn testimony we have now obtained, he dismissed it as "Disneyland East."

But the testimony was taken from no less than John Caulfield, the ex-Treasury Department aide and jack-of-all-tricks, who did undercover work for the White House. He told the Senate Watergate investigators behind closed doors that he refused to start the Brookings fire because "enough is enough."

The mini-Reichstag by Mr. Nixon's aides, as detailed in a secret summary of Caulfield's testimony, was proposed "in early July of 1971." Caulfield said Colson asked him "to get some national security documents from the office of Leslie Gelb (a former Defense Depart-

ment official) at the Brookings Institute."

The careful Caulfield, uneasy about sneaking documents out of Gelb's office, warned Colson "of the difficulties that the project would cause because of the security questions."

Declares the document: "Colson suggested that one way of getting the information was to have the District of Columbia fire regulations changed and have the FBI respond to all arson. Colson suggested that there could be a fire at the Brookings Institute and then the FBI could take the file out of Gelb's office."

Caulfield said he "believed that the clear implication was for (him) to start a fire there." But this was too much for the White House gumshoe. After hearing Colson's proposal, Caulfield "literally ran to (presidential counsel John) Dean's office" and said he was catching "the next plane to San Clemente because 'enough is enough'."

Caulfield explained that Dean had also been interested in Brookings and had sought "background about its person-

nel and financing." Indeed, Dean may have had Brookings' tax returns "pulled . . . in the summer of 1971." But the Reichstag concept was also too much for Dean.

So Dean himself, rather than Caulfield, flew to San Clemente. Upon his return, Dean instructed Caulfield "to forget about Colson's project and the Brookings Institute." That was the last Caulfield "heard of the project," he testified, "until Colson brought it up at a wedding, January, 1973, and mentioned that he considered it a very funny joke."

Colson, in a talk with us, said, "The story is Disneyland East, and I have fully testified before federal investigating bodies as to the true circumstances." Colson's friends insist he is given to overstatement in jest.

Inside the White House—An embattled President Nixon discussed the pros and cons of resigning with his advisers before he declared to the nation his determination to stay in the White House, if physically able, until the end of his term.

The President told his aides solemnly that he would step down if he should ever feel his

leadership was hurting America. But he felt that he had greater experience and understanding than any successor to deal with the foreign policy problems now facing the nation.

The implication of his remark was that he considered it a patriotic duty to remain on the job. He felt those who are now calling for his departure simply don't understand the gravity of the international crisis.

Mr. Nixon reminded aides that President Harry Truman had fought back an all-time, 23 per cent low in the polls. The American people like a fighter, said the President, who indicated he would follow this example.

He noted that the demands for his impeachment have already changed, largely, to calls for his resignation. He regards this as evidence that his foes doubt their ability to impeach him.

For him to resign, added the President, would be taken as an admission of guilt. Therefore he intends to spend his remaining three years in office battling, Truman-style, for his "rightful place in history."

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