

'Chicago 7'

Why Contempt Trial Went Ahead

Chicago

Acting Attorney General Robert H. Bork sought to dismiss contempt-of-court charges against the so-called Chicago Seven and their lawyer, but changed his mind at the insistence of James R. Thompson, the U.S. attorney here, Thompson testified in federal court yesterday.

Thompson described an emergency meeting in Washington on October 27 during which he said Bork argued that the charges should be dropped, as a "liberal gesture" in the Watergate era.

Four other key Justice Department aides supported Bork's position, Thompson said, and only Assignment Attorney General Henry E. Petersen, chief of the department's criminal division, agreed that the contempt case should go forward.

The U.S. attorney, whose record here has given him considerable influence with-

in the Justice Department, said he insisted at the time that the case was important, among other reasons, "to reestablish the rule of law in American courtrooms."

The contempt case grows out of the 1969-70 conspiracy trial of the "Chicago Seven," who were charged with violating the federal anti-riot statute during demonstrations at the 1968 Democratic National Convention here.

Now in its third week, the contempt trial took an unusual turn yesterday with U.S. District Judge Robert R. Merhige Jr. of Richmond, Va. testified that William M. Kunstler, one of the defense attorneys at the original trial and a defendant in the contempt case, had always behaved in an "exemplary" manner during appearances before Merhige in controversial cases.

The defense considered Merhige's testimony important to establish Kunstler's courtroom "habits."

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