

Fact or Fantasy at Watergate Hearing?



Jack Anderson

EVERY few months, the nation's most erratic publisher, William Loeb, jolts the country with some fantastic story in his Manchester (N.H.) Union-Leader. As often as not, the revelation is the work of his star reporter, Arthur Egan.

Last week, Egan's "Mission: Impossible" Watergate stories put him behind closed doors at the Senate Watergate Committee.

Dumbfounded committee sleuths are still trying to weed the fancy from the fact in Egan's astonishing secret statement, all of it given under oath.

What brought him to the committee was his claim that Teamster vice presidents and other Teamster bigwigs were ordered to kick in \$1000 each toward a \$175,000 war chest for President Nixon's 1972 campaign. Las Vegas casinos with Teamsters' loans came up with another \$400,000, he said.

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AS IT TURNS OUT, the alleged custodian of the war chest is suing Egan and his paper, and has already caught Egan in a glaring departure from the truth. However, Newsweek, even as we were writing this story, quoted former Teamsters' chief James Hoffa telling of a \$60,000 to \$175,000 war chest collected from the union's leaders at \$1000 a clip.

The committee also heard a sizzling tale of how the then attorney general, John Mitchell, irked at Egan's criticism of the Justice Department, was "going to put some agents on me and wattle me silly." "Wattles" are rods of woven wood.

The "wattling," Egan said under oath, was ordered by Mitchell personally "to shut me up" about stories demanding Hoffa's release from prison. Mitchell said Egan, used misleading old records to try to get Egan indicted on gun charges.

In view of the Nixon Administration's hassling of the press via wiretaps, arrests and tax audits, Egan's charge sounded plausible. Besides, Egan claimed that both the then U.S. Attorney for New Hampshire, David Brock, and the State's Attorney General, Warren Rudman, would back him up. We contacted both Brock, who said the yarn was "completely erroneous," and Rudman, who snorted it was "horse ----."

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EGAN'S CREDIBILITY dropped even further when he testified that the late J. Edgar Hoover was "murdered." As his questioners gasped, he went on, "everyone on hearing that says I am nuts, but somebody in the Watergate thing murdered . . . J. Edgar Hoover."

When his interrogators recovered enough to query him, he admitted his statement was "just my own hunch." All available evidence indicates it is a false hunch.

Footnote: In our talks with Egan, he stuck to the story he told the committee. His "wattling" by the administration, he said, included questions on his tax returns for five consecutive years.

Today's column was written under the direction of Les Whitten of Jack Anderson's staff.