

Dean Accused of Plot to Blackmail Nixon

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WASHINGTON, April 30 — The White House accused John W. Dean 3d today of attempting to blackmail President Nixon in an effort to gain immunity from prosecution.

Continuing an assault on the credibility of Mr. Dean began last night when Mr. Nixon made his nationally televised speech, James D. St. Clair, the special Presidential counsel for Watergate affairs, also suggested in a 50-page legal brief that Mr. Dean had repeatedly perjured himself in sworn testimony.

In private conversations at the White House today, some aides contended that seven or eight specific examples of lying were evident from comparing the transcripts of Watergate conversations that were released today by the White House with what Mr. Dean told the Senate Watergate committee. His testimony before that committee was by far the most damaging to the President.

Perjury Charge Possible

One source said it was possible that the White House would try to persuade Leon Jaworski, the special Watergate prosecutor, to prosecute Mr. Dean for perjury.

The blackmail charge against Mr. Dean, the former White House counsel, had never been made publicly before now.

Mr. St. Clair said in his brief that on April 27, 1973, Henry E. Petersen, the Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, reported to the President that Dean's lawyer was threatening that, unless Dean got immunity, "we will bring the President in — not in this case [the cover-up] but in other things."

Never Got Full Immunity

According to the transcript, Mr. Nixon replied:

"All right. We have the immunity problem resolved. Do it [grant immunity to] Dean if you need to, but I am telling you—there ain't going to be any blackmail."

In fact, Mr. Dean was never

granted full immunity. He pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to obstruct justice and is still awaiting sentencing, while cooperating with the prosecution.

Mr. St. Clair's brief also pointed up a number of contradictions between Mr. Dean's testimony and the White House transcripts, without describing these as perjury. That was left to other aides, who spoke with the understanding that they would not be named.

For example, Mr. St. Clair quoted from the transcript of a meeting on March 22, 1973, in which Mr. Nixon told Mr. Dean, "I want a written report" of Mr. Dean's investigation of the cover-up. And he quoted Mr. Dean's testimony to the Watergate committee, in which the former counsel said:

"He [the President] never at any time asked me to write a report, and it wasn't until after I had arrived at Camp David that I received a call from [H. R.] Haldeman asking me to write the report up."

'Chance to Get Him'

The White House clearly intends to press on with its campaign against Mr. Dean, in the belief—as an insider put it today—that "we've got to get him or he may get us, and now we think we really have a chance to get him."

The conclusion of the jury foreman in the New York conspiracy trial of two former Cabinet officers—John N. Mitchell and Maurice H. Stans—that Mr. Dean was "often unbelievable," appears to have given the White House the impression that Mr. Dean is vulnerable.

So the President's men have set out to create a second John Dean.

The first Mr. Dean was the well-groomed man with the matter-of-fact voice who testified last summer before the Senate Watergate committee. As he came across on television, Mr. Dean was cool, careful and repentant for his part in the cover-up. He seemed to bear no animus toward Mr. Nixon or anyone else.

And he used a phrase to describe his warning to Mr. Nixon at their meeting on March 21,

1973 — "there was a cancer growing on the Presidency"—that stuck in the public mind for months.

The Mr. Dean that Mr. St. Clair and others are now painting is vastly different—a man who they said deliberately lied to the Senate Watergate committee and who they contend was willing to say almost anything, even threaten the President—to save his own skin through immunity.

One ranking White House official said today that "the highest levels" were now convinced that it could be shown that "Dean is a liar on a grand scale," and that "we intend to demand to be shown why he should not be prosecuted forthwith."

Nothing in the transcripts, Mr. St. Clair said, in any way supports Mr. Dean's contention that Mr. Nixon knew of the cover-up before the March 21 meeting; indeed, there is a good deal of material that rebuts him.

But there is a third John Dean that can now be viewed by the public, and that is the John Dean quoted in the transcripts, particularly those of the March 21 meeting.

Similar to President

This Mr. Dean emerges as a man much like the President who speaks through the transcripts. Both discuss the payment of hush money freely, as a viable alternative; both continually discuss means of avoiding prosecution for those they know to have been involved in the cover-up; both talk about those who have committed perjury without condemnation.

In other words, both Mr. Dean and Mr. Nixon emerge as men more concerned about minimizing political damage, avoiding exposure and saving face than about punishing the guilty or uncovering the truth.

Thus, it may be difficult, once the public has digested the transcripts, for Mr. Dean to continue to sell himself as the reformed sinner; it may be equally difficult for Mr. Nixon to picture himself as a man maligned by Mr. Dean.