

MAHEU SAYS UNIT AIDED NIXON IN '56

Testifies Hughes Paid for Thwarting of Stassen on Altering G.O.P. Ticket

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LOS ANGELES, May 10—In 1956, Howard R. Hughes paid most of the cost of a secret agent operation, staffed by former Federal Bureau of Investigation agents, that thwarted an attempt by Harold E. Stassen to have Richard M. Nixon removed from the Republican Presidential ticket, a witness testified in Federal Court here today.

Robert A. Maheu, testifying in support of his \$17.3-million defamation suit against the Hughes interests, for which he once worked, testified that he had been asked by Mr. Hughes to examine the "dump Nixon" program organized by Mr. Stassen.

Mr. Maheu testified that his organization had "penetrated" the Stassen operation and discovered that a public opinion poll was being conducted to measure Mr. Nixon's influence on the vote for the Republican ticket. Then, Mr. Maheu said, a separate poll was undertaken.

This separate poll was conducted by retired F.B.I. agents, Mr. Maheu said. The results were turned over to the late Senator Styles Bridges of New Hampshire, who disclosed them after the Stassen poll was released, Mr. Maheu testified. The results were radically different, he said, with the Bridges poll showing that Mr. Nixon was a benefit to the ticket.

Result of Effort

"The result was that the Stassen effort collapsed," Mr. Maheu said. He added that he had also been invited to the 1957 inaugural ceremonies, and that he had told officials and members of the Nixon wing of the Republican party what he had done.

This, he said, was the beginning of what he described as his influence within the Nixon organization—a position that he said had been paid for and used in behalf of Mr. Hughes.

A decade later when Mr. Nixon had become President, Mr. Maheu played a role in having a \$100,000 campaign contribution from Mr. Hughes delivered to Mr. Nixon's friend, Charles G. Rebozo. This transaction is a subject of continued investigation at several levels of the Federal Government.

Mr. Maheu, who began his testimony today in support of his suit, said his first job for Mr. Hughes was in 1954 to check on whether a man, whom he did not name, had a Federal Government connection. He said the man was dating Jean Peters, the actress who later was married to Mr. Hughes and then divorced him.

Bahamas Interest Cited

Mr. Maheu told of hiring for Mr. Hughes the late Sir Stafford Sands, leader of the Bay Street Boys, the white government of the Bahamas, which fell after charges of corruption were widely publicized in the nineteen-sixties.

Mr. Maheu said that in the late nineteen-fifties, Mr. Hughes, who now lives in the Bahamas, was interested in acquiring control of the Nassau Airport and of Transoceanic telephone communications from the islands.

Mr. Maheu said his jobs included checking on the accuracy of Government measurement of nuclear fallout following tests, and of arranging for Mr. Hughes to prevent destruction of the "Spruce Goose," his wooden airplane in storage at Long Beach, Calif.

The General Services Administration planned to destroy it, the witness said, but Mr. Hughes wanted the plane preserved so he could continue to write-off on tax returns his personal investment in it. The problem was solved with an arrangement for a rental fee of \$9,600 annually from Mr. Hughes to the Federal Government, Mr. Maheu said.

Judge Harry Pregerson, presiding at the trial, asked Mr. Maheu what his usefulness to Mr. Hughes was. The witness replied, "I was a believable item at government levels."

Mr. Maheu said that in 1959 he and Mr. Hughes quarreled when Mr. Hughes had become demanding on his time at the expense of service to other clients of his company, Robert A. Maheu Associates.

After the quarrel, Mr. Hughes told Mr. Maheu, the witness said, to bill the Hughes companies heavily for his services. Mr. Maheu said the billionaire industrialist had told him that it was important that other executives in his organization not know how highly Mr. Maheu was compensated.

When he was dismissed in 1970, his company was being paid \$520,000 a year, by the Hughes interests, Mr. Maheu said. This covered the expenses of the Maheu operation, which had several employees, the witness said.

Evidence presented by the Hughes interests has been that Mr. Maheu overcharged by several hundreds of thousands of dollars for services performed for Mr. Hughes in the Tucson, Ariz., area. The defense for Mr. Hughes in the civil action has argued that this substantiates Mr. Hughes's remark that Mr. Maheu "stole me blind," which is part of the basis of the suit.