

Report of a Key Ehrlichman Tape

Washington

The special Watergate prosecutor has obtained a tape recording of an April, 1973, White House meeting that investigators say represents a key link in the cover-up in the Watergate bugging case. The meeting, which occurred April 14, involved John D. Ehrlichman, who was President Nixon's chief domestic adviser, and John N. Mitchell, head of the President's re-election campaign.

"Because President Nixon was not involved in the conversation, which was held in Ehrlichman's office, the tape was not among those subpoenaed by special prosecutor Leon Jaworski.

Sources who confirmed that Jaworski now has the tape in his possession declined to say how it was received or what, precisely, it contained.

Much is already known, however, about the general purposes and nature of the conversation.

According to the White House transcript of a meeting earlier that same day between Mr. Nixon, Ehrlichman, and H. R. Haldeman, the President's chief of staff, Ehrlichman hoped to persuade Mitchell to take the blame for Watergate.

After the meeting with Mitchell, Ehrlichman called the President to report that he had failed.

Far from accepting blame, Ehrlichman reported — again according to the edited transcripts — Mitchell

had accused the White House of complicity in the coverup, "lobbed mud balls at the White House at every opportunity," and even suggested at one point that some payments of "hush money" to the original Watergate defendants had come directly from the White house.

Given the nature of the Ehrlichman-Mitchell exchange, investigators think the actual recording may shed considerable light on the coverup.

During the early morning meeting in the Oval Office on April 14, the White House transcript indicate, Ehrlichman outlined for the President and Haldeman how he planned to get Mitchell to accept responsibility for Watergate.

At one point during the preliminary discussion, Ehrlichman remarked that he "would like a record of my conversation" with Mitchell.

The transcript shows Mr. Nixon as having suggested then that Ehrlichman "gear up" the tape recording machinery in Ehrlichman's office. "Do you know, do you have a way to gear it up?" he asked.

"Yeh," Ehrlichman replied, "I've done it before."

"Well go gear it," ordered the President, adding a moment later, "I don't want to hear the record, I want to say . . . don't have me hear the record."

New York Times