

A Look at 'Watergate' 2 Years After Break-In

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Watergate is two years old tomorrow.

It was on June 17, 1972, that the Washington police, guns drawn confronted five burglars inside the sixth-floor offices of the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate office building. From that seemingly minor event has grown the worst political scandal in United States history.

President Nixon faces the possibility of impeachment. A number of his aides have gone to prison. Criminal trials of others lie ahead.

Following are questions and answers summarizing the status of the cases:

Q. When will the Watergate investigations end?

A. Not for a while. Virtually every door that has been opened has led to yet another door.

Q. But isn't Leon Jaworski, the special prosecutor, done looking for crime and criminals?

A. About three-quarters done. The major investigations are almost finished, except for finances—that is, the President's finances, dairy farmers' pledges, whether there was fraud involved in Mr. Nixon's income tax statements and whether big contributions won favored treatment from Government agencies while "enemies" were punished.

Q. How many more trials will there be?

A. There are five to go. But if more indictments are handed up, there can be more trials. Mr. Jaworski has made it clear he would prefer to clear up Watergate by getting even top men, like Charles W. Colson, to plead guilty rather than go to trial.

Q. What has happened so far in court?

A. The score is 31 guilty, five cleared and 12 awaiting trials. All told, 45 men have gone before the courts in Watergate crimes. Some have been indicted more than once. Former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, along with former Commerce Secretary Maurice H. Stans, was cleared in one trial but unrelated to Watergate faces another trial.

Q. Is the Senate Watergate committee still in existence?

A. Yes. No further public hearings are scheduled, but the staff is working on a final report.

Q. What about impeachment?

A. The issue is expected to reach the floor of the House for a vote within two months.

Q. Why is the issue of the White House tapes dragging on?

A. Because so many people want them. Defendants in criminal cases say they might be cleared by them. Mr. Jaworski says he needs some to end his investigation and needs others to prepare for trials. The House Judiciary Committee wants some for its impeachment investigation. The Senate Watergate committee keeps trying to get some but keeps losing in the courts. There are also other trials, such as the one over the Indian violence at Wounded Knee, where tapes have been requested.

Q. How can the courts decide who will get them and who will not?

A. Judge John J. Sirica of United States District Court ruled in the first tapes case that the President had a right to keep his papers and tapes private. But sometimes, the judge said, there can be other things—such as investigation of crimes—that may be more important than a President's right to privacy. A judge should decide which is more important, he said. So a group of tapes went to Judge Sirica. He listened to them, then turned over those parts he thought were important to the Watergate investigation to the special prosecutor and kept the rest secret in the courthouse. That is the way tapes have been handled since, though in most cases, the White House has refused to turn them over. The issue has now gone to the Supreme Court.

Q. If the tapes belong to the President and his

voice is on them, isn't that asking him to testify against himself?

A. No. They are official documents—like a letter memo or tax return. If the President had had a secretary taking notes on the meetings in question instead of using hidden tape recorders, the notes would be an official record of the meeting. So Mr. Nixon is in the position of having to turn over tapes and papers that might hurt him and his former friends.

Q. The President has turned over some tapes and papers already, and has released some edited. How much have they hurt?

A. In the criminal investigations, it is hard to say because Mr. Jaworski keeps those things secret. But he needed them before bringing the indictments in the Watergate cover-up case. In the impeachment investigation it has hurt because some of President Nixon's long-time political supporters in Congress have read the transcripts and spoken out against him.

Q. Why have the impeachment and the criminal investigations been separated? Don't both depend on the likelihood that someone has committed a crime?

A. Impeachment is not a criminal trial and does not follow criminal court rules. It is a political trial—that is, a political process for removing a man from office. The jurors are all members of Congress. If a man is impeached by the House and then convicted by the Senate he can be charged with a crime once out of office. But that has never been done after past impeachments.

Q. Has the President been charged with any crimes?

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A. No. Mr. Jaworski said he did not think a President could be charged with a crime while in office. Mr. Nixon has been named an unindicted co-conspirator in the Watergate cover-up, but that is not a criminal charge. This means that the grand jury thought he was part of a criminal conspiracy to cover up Watergate but, probably on Mr. Jaworski's advice, the jury did not charge him with any crime. So the grand jury instead voted to send a briefcase full of evidence to the House of Representatives on President Nixon's role during the cover-up period and let the House decide what it wanted to do about Mr. Nixon's role.