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Colson Talks About 'Extortion'



Jack Anderson

IN AN IRONIC TWIST, the White House's high priest of snooper, Charles Colson, was himself recently bugged as he uttered some of the Watergate scandal's most indiscreet confessions.

Colson, when he was the top White House hatchet man, was fond of flipping a switch and tape recording friends and enemies alike. A few days before he went to prison for obstructing justice, however, he was secretly recorded as he bared his soul to Washington businessman and sometime private eye Richard Bast.

Unaware of the turning reels, Colson speculated that the CIA planned a "Seven Days in May" takeover of the government. He also asserted that the Pentagon practiced extortion to keep President Nixon from arresting military men who stole his secrets.

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IN SOMETIMES hostile, sometimes contrite language, Colson described President Nixon behind his back as being short on "guts." Behind Colson's back, Mr. Nixon had been equally critical of Colson, the White House tapes show.

The two men discussed how Mr. Nixon could rid himself of CIA and military spying on the White House.

"He's got the message," brooded Colson. "And he's thinking about it. He's got a helluva problem . . . Nobody understands this . . . He can't do it himself." Colson explained that Mr. Nixon could not fully trust anyone in the White House to carry out his orders and "he can't sit in there with a machine gun."

The skeptical Bast asked why Mr. Nixon didn't simply order arrests if his National Security Council was being spied on by the military, as recent testimony has confirmed.

"If he tried to do anything about it," sighed Colson, "they would have disclosed a lot of his documents that he was worried about protecting, that they had been stealing . . . right from Kissinger's briefcase."

"In other words," replied Bast, "they practiced extortion on him."

"Subtly," agreed Colson.

"And the President let them get away with it?"

"Yeah," the former White House confidant conceded.

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AS TO THE CIA, Colson said that one of its former agents, Howard Hunt, while in the White House, was in contact directly or indirectly with CIA clandestine bigwigs.

Colson said he never knew whether the CIA infiltrated the White House "to knock (Mr. Nixon) off" — figuratively speaking — "or whether they were in there just to spy . . ."

"Maybe they were trying to pull something similar to a 'Seven Days in May' deal (a fictional military coup)," suggested Bast.

"Could have been, could have been," mused Colson. "I can't say there was a conspiracy to do it, but I will say that was the practical consequence of their actions."