

WATERGATE FOCUS IS ON 'HUSH MONEY'

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Defendants' Strategy Seems
to Be to Deny Any Role
in Silence Payments

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 1—For 29 days the prosecution at the Watergate cover-up trial presented witnesses, documents and tape recordings in an effort to prove that the five defendants had conspired to obstruct justice through such means as payments of "hush money" to the seven Watergate burglars.

Now it is the defense's turn to describe those payments. In the first three days, of defense testimony only two defendants have had a chance to speak. But, already, the pattern seems clear.

The defendants are not going to contest the fact that the money was paid to the burglars involved in the break-in on June 17, 1972, at The offices of The Democratic National Committee in The Watergate Complex here.

Nor, apparently, are they going to argue that someone else, perhaps the burglars or some White House or campaign aides, might have regarded the payments as hush money.

Instead, each defendant seems to be contending, or prepared to contend, that he did not participate in a plan to buy the burglars' silence.

Mitchell First to Testify

John N. Mitchell, the former Attorney General who was the director of Richard M. Nixon's re-election campaign in 1972, was the first defendant to take the stand.

He told the jury last Tuesday that he had heard from time to time in the months after the break-in that money was being paid to the defendants. But with one slight exception, he said, he did not get involved.

"I had no concern about these matters," he testified. "There were other people that apparently did, who had initiated it, and I thought they could continue to carry out their programs without my assistance."

The only exception, he told the jury, came in March, 1973, when he received a call from Frederick C. LaRue, a campaign official who later pleaded guilty to a role in the cover-up, and who testified at the trial about the same call.

Mr. LaRue, according to Mr. Mitchell, asked whether he, Mr. LaRue, should make a certain payment to the lawyer for one of the Watergate burglars.

'Legal Fees'

"I asked Mr. LaRue what the money was for and he said "legal fees," Mr. Mitchell recounted, "and I in effect told him that if he had made such payments before that if I were him, I would go ahead and pay it."

H. R. Haldeman, the former White House chief of staff, followed Mr. Mitchell on the stand and will resume testifying tomorrow.

The other three defendants are John D. Ehrlichman, former chief domestic adviser to Mr. Nixon; Kenneth W. Parkinson, who was a lawyer for the Committee for the Re-election of the President, and Robert C. Mardian, a former Assistant Attorney general and official of the committee.

Mr. Haldeman said in his testimony that he also had heard from time to time in the months after the break-in that money was being paid to the burglars.

He said, however, that it was not until March 21, 1973, that he heard any reference to "blackmail" by one of the Watergate burglars.

He said that when he heard of the payments earlier, it had always been his understanding that they were for "family support" and legal fees for the burglars.

Mr. Haldeman's chief counsel, John J. Wilson, had Mr. Haldeman repeat, several times the point about legal fees and "support."

Mr. Haldeman had said that he heard of the payments on several occasions from John W. Dean 3d, the former counsel to Mr. Nixon and now a key prosecution witness.

"On any of these occasions did he say anything which was tantamount to raising money as hush money to keep their mouths shut?" Mr. Wilson asked.

"No sir," Mr. Haldeman replied.

Purpose of Money-Raising

"Did you get the impression from him that was the purpose of raising the money?" Mr. Wilson pressed.

Mr. Haldeman's answer was cut off by an objection from the prosecution. But a few minutes later, Mr. Wilson returned to the point.

"On these approaches to Mr. Dean which you said the substance of the conversation was, family support, attorney's fees, bail money, did you get any impression like he was hinting to you or any way implying it was for any other purpose?" Mr. Wilson asked.

"I did not," was the reply.

This line of questioning is based on the fact that there is no law against paying legal fees of an employe or a former employe, as some companies and organizations do from time to time.