

SFChronicle DEC 7 1974

Hunt's Lawyer Denies It Was Hush Money

Washington

William Bittman, once the lawyer for Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr., denied yesterday that he had known the burglars were paid to keep quiet and had lied about it.

Watergate prosecutors, wrapping up the tenth week of the coverup trial, charged Bittman was still trying to "stonewall" and said his testimony was an attempt to "torpedo" their case.

Called as a court witness over defense and prosecution objections, Bittman insisted the \$156,000 he received as Hunt's lawyer was for legal fees and nothing else.

"I had no information to believe that any money paid to Mr. Hunt was for his silence . . ." he shouted at one point, pounding the witness box with his fist. "Mr. Hunt never indicated to me in any manner whatsoever that anything he was doing was a quid pro quo, that is, silence in exchange for money. In fact, everything was to the contrary."

In a withering 90 minutes of cross-examination, assistant special prosecutor Jill Volner insisted Bittman knew the cash was hush money, knew Hunt was lying about it and hid the truth from investigators.

"You knew Hunt was not telling what he knew; that he was keeping quiet," Mrs. Volner charged.

"That is not correct at all . . ." Bittman replied, his face flushed and fists clenched.

"You knew the facts that Hunt knew and you knew he was keeping quiet about those facts," Mrs. Volner continued.

"That is not true," Bittman replied. "The facts were consistent with his sworn testimony that there was no quid pro quo."

"It was consistent with the fact that he was getting paid for keeping quiet," Mrs. Volner shot back.

At least three previous witnesses said the cash payments to the burglars and their lawyer, \$429,500 in all, was to keep them quiet about high-level involvement in the Watergate break-in plot.

Bittman also said he had not read Hunt's Nov. 14, 1972, memo about White House "commitments" to the Watergate burglars until

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Paper Comes In From The Cold

Washington

Washington Post publisher Katherine Graham and executive editor Benjamin Bradlee were President Ford's guests at a White House dinner Thursday night, ending the newspaper's longtime exclusion from White House affairs.

The two attended a state dinner in honor of visiting West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt.

"It is a long time since we have been here," Mrs. Graham said.

Post reporters were banned from White House functions in the latter days of Richard Nixon's presidency because of the newspaper's opposition to administration policies and its role in uncovering Watergate.

United Press

six months after it was written. The memo charged the Nixon administration had committed itself to provide pardons and hush money for the Watergate bugging team and had not done so.

Bittman represented Hunt, one of the masterminds of the Watergate bugging, for 14 months beginning in July 1972. He was named an unindicted co-conspirator in the coverup and is now believed to be under further criminal investigation.

U. S. Judge John Sirica called Bittman as a court witness in order to "get the facts out" after prosecution and defense counsels refused to vouch for his credibility and argued heatedly against calling him. The prosecution protested again, with the jury out of the room, after Bittman had testified for an hour.

"He went out of his way on the stand to torpedo the government's case," chief prosecutor James Neal shouted. "I won't allow that as long as I've got life in my body."

Sirica waived the protests aside.

"Just because we judges sit up here in black robes, we're not nincompoops," he said. "This convinces me I

was right when I changed my mind and called him as a court witness. The jury is entitled to know the truth as to the issues and one of the issues is whether this money was hush money. This goes to the heart of the case."

Earlier yesterday, Charles Colson testified that H. R. Haldeman told him just as the Watergate coverup was beginning to collapse that President Nixon might appear to be part of the coverup.

"Bob said he was concerned that the President not appear to be covering up," Colson testified. "I told Bob that I didn't think the President had done so."

Colson, a former White House special counsel now serving a 1-to-3 year prison term for his role in the Ellsberg burglary, read from a memo he had made of a conversation with Haldeman on March 23, 1973 — two days after John W. Dean III had told Mr. Nixon about the coverup and advised him there was "a growing cancer" on the presidency.

Besides Haldeman, the defendants at the trial are former Attorney General John Mitchell, former White House aide John Ehrlichman, former Assistant Attorney General Robert Mardian and re-election lawyer Kenneth Parkinson.

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