

WXPPost Dent Pleads Guilty on Funds

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HARRY S. DENT SR.
... "more the victim"

By Timothy S. Robinson
Washington Post Staff Writer

Harry S. Dent Sr., a South Carolina lawyer who became former President Nixon's top political strategist during Nixon's first term, pleaded guilty yesterday to aiding and abetting an illegal fund-raising operation organized by the White House in 1970.

Dent, 44, was placed on unsupervised probation for one month by U.S. District Chief Judge George L. Hart Jr., who characterized Dent as "more of the victim than the perpetrator" of the misdemeanor charge to which Dent pleaded guilty. The illegal campaign raised more than \$3 million

that was funneled to White House-approved candidates in congressional elections that year.

The sentence was imposed after Dent read a statement to the judge in which he said that the operation was "under the direction of the President of the United States . . . and I believed, and in fact was told, that the program was legal."

Dent, obviously bitter at the Watergate special prosecutor's office for bringing the charges under what his attorney, Judah Best, called an "ancient, out-moded, confusing and re-

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pealed (campaign-financing) law," said afterwards that he had entered the guilty plea because he did not feel he could get a fair trial in what he called an atmosphere of "Watergate infestation" here.

"I honestly did not feel I could get a fair trial in Washington, D.C., in the current atmosphere," Dent told reporters after sentencing. He said also that prosecutors had indicated they would charge him with a felony in connection with the fund-raising operation and bring him to trial

with former White House aide because it did not have a committee chairman or treasurer, as required by law.

"I honestly felt I did nothing wrong," Dent told reporters. At his sentencing, Dent told Judge Hart that "I did not consciously nor intentionally violate this law. . . . Any nonwillful violation came as the result of inadvertence on my part."

Dent, who practices law in Columbia, S.C., said he thought the fund-raising operation that came to be known as "Operation Townhouse" was a legitimate operation when it was set up by the White House. Investigators have said the fund was set up by Haldeman, with Jack A. Gleason detailed from Dent's White House staff to implement the program and designate the congressional campaign committees that were to get the money.

The operation was illegal

Gleason has pleaded guilty to aiding and abetting the same operation and is awaiting sentencing. Former President Nixon's personal attorney, Herbert W. Kalmbach, pleaded guilty to raising money for the project and is serving a jail term of 6 to 18 months. Haldeman has not been charged in connection with the operation.

When asked yesterday by Judge Hart how the fund worked, Dent gave the following explanation:

He said it was supposed to be a "conduit system . . . Mr. Kalmbach, for example, would go to see a friend of the President and say, 'would you like to have some expert advice?' in making political contributions. Kalmbach would then funnel the contribution to an appropriate candidate, Dent said.

Professing ignorance on the actual operating details, Dent said that "what evidently occurred is that it finally didn't work that way." He said several large checks came in from one contributor and "they weren't easy to funnel, being in checks of \$150,000."

He said the money was placed in a bank account, and funds were distributed from it directly to candidates. According to the law in effect at the time, a political committee should have been organized with a treasurer and chairman to handle that money, prosecutors have said.

"I did not know about that part which you might say went wrong," Dent added. His attorney, Best, said that Kalmbach and Gleason also would testify, if necessary, that Dent did not know the particulars of the operation.

Basically, Best told Hart, Dent would recommend that money be sent to a certain state and the next contact he

would have would be a call from someone from that state thanking him for the donation.

At that point, Hart broke in to say, "You make it sound like he's a victim instead of a perpetrator," a point Hart reiterated when he imposed the sentence.

In his two-page statement to the judge, Dent said he was "prepared to face my responsibility. I am a Republican and conservative because I believe in individual freedom and with that individual responsibility. I should have avoided any involvement with anything that might be subject to question even when questioned four years after the event."

Dent expressed concern that for the rest of his life "and into the history books my name will be incorrectly connected with Watergate, although obviously I have no involvement in that matter."

"My greatest punishment," Dent told the judge, "is that—

a bad footnote in history and the embarrassment this will cause my family and my name forever."

Dent, who could have been sentenced to one year in jail and fined \$1,000, described himself as "the one full-time political man at the White House for President Nixon's first four years."

He is most prominently known as the chief architect of the Nixon administration's "Southern strategy." He came to the White House after being chief aide to Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.), for more than 10 years and left the White House in early 1973.

Most recently, he was general counsel of the National Republican Committee, resigning from that post last weekend.

The "Southern strategy" was described by political observers as an attempt by the Nixon administration to gain support for Republicans in traditionally Southern Demo-

cratic strongholds by tating administration policy in favor of issues supported by prominent Southern political leaders.

Dent is the third prominent individual charged by the Watergate special prosecutor's office to escape being jailed after pleading guilty or being convicted for a crime.

Judge Hart placed former Attorney General Richard Kleindienst on one month's unsupervised probation for his guilty plea to a controversial misdemeanor charge in connection with his Senate confirmation hearings.

U.S. District Court Judge Barrington D. Parker placed former California Lt. Gov. Ed Reinecke on probation after his conviction of perjury during those same Kleindienst confirmation hearings.

Other Watergate-related figures have received jail terms ranging from a minimum of four months to a maximum of 20 years.