

Watergate Is Rekindled As Trial Lawyers Meet

MAR 12 1975

NYTimes

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Special to The New York Times

ACAPULCO, Mexico, March 11—The fierce legal debate over Watergate, presumably stilled by the resignation of President Nixon and the results of the cover-up trial, was renewed in full force today in this lush tropical resort.

At the annual spring meeting of the American College of Trial Lawyers, more than 1,000 members and their wives packed the ballroom of the Acapulco Princess Hotel for two hours this morning to hear three prominent lawyers stubbornly challenge past criticism of their actions during the scandal.

The turnout was prompted not only by the prominence of the Watergate luminaries making a nostalgic reappearance together but also by a pervasive concern among lawyers that their profession had suffered serious damage by the involvement of its members in the scandal.

Decision Defended

Leon Jaworski, the former special prosecutor, defended his decision not to indict Richard M. Nixon for obstruction of justice and expressed serious doubt that the former President could ever have received a fair trial if he had been indicted.

James D. St. Clair, the special counsel who defended Mr. Nixon through the climax of the Watergate inquiry, continued to object to the tactics of the House Judiciary Committee and

argued that he had won his case before the Supreme Court.

Albert R. Jenner, associate counsel to the House Judiciary Committee, underscored the personal stand that cost him his job as Republican minority counsel by reading from the articles of impeachment and accusing Mr. Nixon of lying.

The audience of trial lawyers, more sensitive than most Americans to the responsibility of every attorney to represent his client, gave the three men—all members of the relatively exclusively college—generous and approximately equal applause.

Mr. Jaworski told how he had warned President Ford before the Nixon pardon that the former President, if he should be indicted, would have to wait at least a year, possibly as long as three with charges still pending, before a fair trial could be held.

Mr. St. Clair maintained that the Supreme Court decision forcing Mr. Nixon to surrender the White House tapes had "enhanced the office of the Presidency" by recognizing for the first time the existence of executive privilege—while denying Mr. Nixon the right to invoke its protection.

Admonishing his colleagues that their highest duty was to protect the justice system, Mr. Jenner said:

"Your President lied. Substantially every press release and press conference in 1973 and 1974 was false and misleading. Not only was he guilty of abusive power, but he lied to you."

Apparently shaken by his experience with the House Judiciary Committee, Mr. St. Clair warned that the legislative branch was attempting to reclaim power from the White House, a move he said might be "overdue" but that also could bring the nation "perilously close to parliamentary government."

Mr. Jaworski defended himself against criticism of his use of plea bargaining by Watergate defendants, saying, "Had it not been for perfectly fair and just plea discussion, the full story of the break-in and cover-up would never have been known."