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# Connally Acquitted of Bribery Charge; Hints He May Resume Political Career

## Jury Is Out 5½ Hours on Accusation of Payoff by a Dairy Group

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WASHINGTON, April 17—John B. Connally was acquitted today of bribery charges in United States District Court.

The 58-year-old former Secretary of the Treasury displayed no emotion as the foreman of the jury stood, glanced quickly at Mr. Connally and said, "The jury finds the defendant not guilty."

Moments later, however, Mr. Connally broke into a broad grin, shook hands exuberantly with his attorney, Edward Bennett Williams, and embraced his wife, Idanell.

"You bet!" he said when he was asked if he was happy at the verdict.

The jury deliberated five and a half hours before finding him not guilty of two separate charges that he had accepted a total of \$10,000 as an illegal gratuity from a dairy farmer organization in 1971.

Mr. Connally, who had been considered a prospective Republican candidate for the Presidency before he was indicted last August, hinted that the acquittal might prompt a resumption of his political career.

"I hope as long as I live I will have the desire to participate in public affairs," he told reporters as he held his wife's hand.

"I've seen the system work today," he said, "and it has made me more deeply committed to preserving the system."

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tions shortly before 11 o'clock this morning, after Judge Hart said that the testimony of Mr. Connally's accuser, Jake Jacobsen, should be treated with "suspicion."

Mr. Jacobsen, a former lawyer for the Associated Milk Producers, Inc., was the only one of three-dozen Government witnesses to testify directly that Mr. Connally had accepted the \$10,000 payoff. Mr. Jacobsen swore that he gave the money to Mr. Connally in two \$5,000 installments in 1971 in appreciation of the Treasury Secretary's help in winning decreased Federal milk price supports.

He said that he gave Mr. Connally \$5,000 on May 14, 1971, and a second \$5,000 on Sept. 24, 1971.

Two years later, when the Watergate investigations began focusing on dairy cooperative gifts of money to President Nixon's re-election campaign, Mr. Jacobsen said, he and Mr. Connally contrived to put \$10,000 of the defendant's money in Mr. Jacobsen's bank deposit box and agreed to swear that it had remained there since 1971.

Mr. Connally denied accept-

ted to preserving the system." Members of his family, some of them with tears in their eyes, surrounded Mr. Connally as he strode briskly, head erect, from the courtroom where his future was at stake for three weeks.

He said that he would make an announcement later about what the verdict might mean in terms of the 1976 elections.

The jury's decision came as a surprise to spectators, who had packed the courtroom at 5:30 P.M. in expectation of a decision by Chief Judge George L. Hart Jr. to send the panel to dinner.

But after a brief conversation in his chambers with the Government and defense at-

torneys, Judge Hart took the bench and announced, "The jury has reached a verdict."

There was a gasp from the spectators. The jurors then filed in slowly and took seats in the jury box. The foreman, a 33-year-old historian whom Judge Hart refused to identify by name, rose to report.

He said that the jury had agreed on verdicts of not guilty to the two charges each involving \$5,000 of the alleged payoff money.

The court clerk then asked the jury if that was the verdict of "each and every one" of the panel members.

"It is," they replied in chorus. The jury began its delibera-

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John B. Connally outside court after he was acquitted

Associated Press

ing any money from Mr. Jacobsen. He testified that Mr. Jacobsen offered \$10,000 as a political contribution on two occasions—June 25, 1971, and in August, 1972—but that both overtures had been rejected.

Mr. Jacobsen's testimony was a result of an arrangement with the prosecution under which he pleaded guilty to having offered the bribe, and the Department of Justice dropped prosecution of him in an unrelated Texas bank fraud case.

The defense had accused Mr. Jacobsen of fabricating the account of the payoff to barter his way out of the Texas charges and to cover up the embezzlement of the money of the dairy farmer cooperative.

### Judge Receives Letters

"You should scrutinize the testimony of an informer carefully to determine whether it is slanted in such a way against the defendant to further his own interest," Judge Hart admonished the jury.

"You should receive such testimony with suspicion and act on it with caution."

He said that he had received about two dozen letters expressing strong views about Mr. Connally's guilt or innocence.

"A lot of them aren't the

best balanced people in the world," he said of the letter writers. He showed reporters one letter from a woman in upstate New York who said that she had discussed the Connally case with God.

The jury reached a verdict within an hour after obtaining from Judge Hart the entire 314-page transcript of Mr. Jacobsen's testimony at the trial. The transcript covered testimony spanning three of the trial's 11 days.

Within minutes of the announcement of the verdict, the jurors were led by United States marshals to automobiles and were whisked away at high speeds. Spectators and reporters were not permitted to approach them.

The Watergate Special Prosecution Force, which argued the Government's case at the trial, had no comment on the outcome.

Mr. Connally is still charged with two counts of perjury and one count of conspiracy to obstruct justice rising out of the original dairy case indictment. But those charges are expected to be dropped since they relate to the bribery charge of which Mr. Connally was found not guilty.

Some lawyers among the spectators wondered aloud if the Government had erred in

going to trial with a case built around the testimony of an admitted perjurer. The prosecution had no comment to inquiries about the reason for bringing the charges, but sources familiar with the case said that the special prosecution force had felt that documents introduced in evidence might suffice to corroborate Mr. Jacobsen's account.

During the trial, the jury consisted of seven women and five men—all but two of the men and one woman were black—but shortly before instructing the jurors this morning on the law governing the case, Judge Hart replaced one of the two white men with a black woman alternate.

He told reporters after the jury began its deliberations that the dismissed member had been excused at the defense's request, because it was discovered yesterday that the juror's wife was a casual acquaintance of a woman who worked for the Watergate Special Prosecution Force.

According to the judge, the matter was called to his attention yesterday by Frank M. Tuerkheimer, the chief prosecutor in the Connally trial.

Mr. Tuerkheimer gave the judge a memorandum in which Ann Goetchens, the acting director of information systems for the special prosecutor's office, described a recent discussion with the juror's wife about a teacher at a school where both women had a child enrolled.

The judge said that examination of Mrs. Goetchens and the juror—who was identified only by his last name, Stoterau—convinced him yesterday afternoon that the contact had been innocent, and that the

juror had not known Mrs. Goetchens himself.

But the defense insisted on the dismissal of Mr. Stoterau, Judge Hart said, and he excused him to avoid any ground for a suggestion that the verdict would have been unfair.

Judge Hart has refused to disclose the identities of the jurors and he said today that

he would keep their names and addresses secret to keep them from being heckled.

As the jury began considering his fate, Mr. Connally appeared confident, if not relaxed. He stood in a courthouse corridor sipping coffee from a plastic cup, chatting with his wife, Idanell, and their three children.