

Lawyers at A.B.A. Parley Indicate Watergate Embarrassment Is Over

By LESLEY OELSNER

Special to The New York Times

MONTREAL, Aug. 14 —

Watergate, in which lawyer after lawyer either pleaded guilty to or was convicted of committing crimes, has ceased to be much of an embarrassment to the legal profession.

The calls by leaders of the bar and by other lawyers for better disciplining of errant attorneys are mostly gone. So are the calls for better ethical training for lawyers. So, too, is the broad agreement among many lawyers, that Watergate pointed to some grave problems and flaws in the profession.

Instead, judging from the speeches and panel discussions and hallway talk at the American Bar Association convention here, Watergate has become, if anything, almost a source of pride for the profession—pride in those lawyers who behaved responsibly or honorably in the scandal and its aftermath, such as the special prosecutors, the Federal judges and the 38 lawyer members of the House Judiciary Committee in the impeachment inquiry.

At the convention here, which officially ended last night, Watergate was certainly a topic. But its treatment was in direct contrast with that at the association's convention two years ago in Washington, D. C., at the time of the televised hearings of the Senate Watergate committee. Then, concerned or embarrassed talk of Watergate was heard everywhere, as were the calls for reform.

Here, Leon Jaworski, the former special prosecutor, gave a speech praising the work of the Federal judiciary during Watergate as "resplendent," as perhaps the judiciary's "finest hour."

Praise Is Returned

The lawyers in turn praised Mr. Jaworski and gave him two awards, one from the College of Trial Lawyers and one from the A.B.A.

Judge John J. Sirica was the star of the convention, a folk

hero. He gave a speech, about how judges and lawyers should treat each other in the courtroom, and hundreds of lawyers and other judges jammed a huge ballroom to hear him. He went out early in the morning to walk the family dog; people stopped to talk to him and ask his autograph.

When Secretary of State Kissinger arrived at the Place des Arts Performance Hall to deliver his speech on international law, Judge Sirica was sitting on the dais and was one of the first people to whom Mr. Kissinger was introduced.

James D. St. Clair, chief lawyer for President Nixon during impeachment proceedings, was also something of an attraction.

He gave one speech in which he said that the profession had to improve its disciplinary procedures and that if it did so, "the lesson of Watergate will have been learned." Yet, he also cautioned that while the lessons of Watergate should not be forgotten, Watergate "is over now" and preoccupation with it could prevent other needs and goals from being met.

He said, too, that while many proposals had been made in the aftermath of Watergate to prevent its recurrence, "very few have been acted upon."

Responsible Acts Cited

In another appearance before a panel on Presidential powers that included Albert E. Jenner Jr., minority counsel in the House impeachment inquiry, Mr. St. Clair said that the resolution of Watergate occurred when many officials acted responsibly and that "I'm proud to say most of them were lawyers."

In this group he included the judges, the prosecutors, the member of the Judiciary Committee and, ultimately, Mr. Nixon, in that he finally resigned.

There were many proposals for reform made at the convention this year, some of them involving Watergate. Attorney General Edward H. Levi disclosed Justice Department proposals yesterday to limit the

Federal Bureau of Investigation's domestic intelligence operations and such other F.B.I. activities as inquiries made at the behest of the White House. A A.B.A. committee appointed in the wake of Watergate recommended a series of reforms designed to deploticise Federal law enforcement agencies.

Yet for the most part these were calls for reforms of Government practices and institutions, not of the profession's ethics or disciplinary systems.

Bar officials, asked by reporters whether Watergate had had any real effect on the profession, insisted that it had—it gave great impetus, they said, to programs that the organized bar had started just before Watergate to improve discipline and ethical training.

They contended, too, that these programs were still priorities of the bar. They conceded, though, that more needed to be done.

"I think the reason we don't hear more about Watergate any more is that people are just sick and tired of hearing about it," James E. Fellers, the outgoing A.B.A. president said at a press briefing. But "certainly," he said, "we have reacted to it," with increased disciplinary and ethics programs.

F. Lamar Forshee, director of the association's National Center for Professional Discipline, said when asked about Watergate's role, "I hope it's had an effect," emphasizing the word "hope." Where "the apathy lies" about Watergate-prompted reforms, he said, is not with bar officials but "probably individual lawyers."

Lawrence E. Walsh, the incoming president, seconded Mr. Fellers's remarks about increased disciplinary proceedings since Watergate. There has been a 50 per cent increase in proceedings that ended with a "sanction," he said.

He also said, however, that he was not sure that problems of professional discipline and ethics had really been a big factor in Watergate.