

Jeffrey Hart

The facts that never came out

THOSE WHO watched the Ervin committee hearings on TV two years ago will recall Fred Thompson, the six-foot-five Tennessee lawyer, who was counsel for the Republican minority. Thompson has written his own account of the Senate Watergate committee in a book called "At That Point in Time."

I have read the page proofs. Thompson comes across as decent, honest, and intelligent and his book contains a number of items which if not quite "bombshells" are at least eyebrow-raisers.

1. The TV audience perceived Sen. Lowell Weicker of Connecticut as a paragon of outraged integrity. But here is Weicker off the tube: It seems that he was angry with Chuck Colson because, allegedly, "Colson had once called Weicker's father in an effort to influence Weicker's vote on a matter before the Senate." However, at the time of the Ervin hearings, "Weicker . . . agreed to meet Colson and (Colson's lawyer) for a discussion of Weicker's complaint."

"After Colson and (his lawyer) arrived in Weicker's office, in the presence of numerous Weicker staff members, Colson tried to explain that Weicker's anger was based on a misunderstanding. Whereupon Weicker cried out, 'You make me sick; just get your . . . out of my office,' and proceeded to throw Colson out."

2. Much was made during the hearings of the improper use of federal agencies by the Nixon Administration. John Dean, however, had turned over to majority counsel Sam Dash two lengthy memoranda from William C. Sullivan, assistant director of the FBI prior to his resignation in 1971. These went into great detail about the practices of previous administrations. The memoranda did not see the light of day during the hearings — the effect of their suppression being to create an impression of the unique villainy of Nixon.

"To my memory," wrote Sullivan, "the two administrations which used the FBI most for political purposes were Mr. (Franklin D.) Roosevelt's and Mr. (Lyndon) Johnson's . . . For example, Mr. Roosevelt requested us to look into the backgrounds of those who opposed his lend-lease bill and other similar activity which politically was contrary to President Roosevelt's views. Mrs. Roosevelt would also make some unusual requests. President Johnson, however, far exceeded the Roosevelts in his use of the FBI for political purposes."

LBJ, it turns out, was Mr. Electronics. He had the FBI bug Anna Chennault, the South Vietnamese embassy, assorted people at the 1964 Democratic convention, the hotel rooms of Martin Luther King, and several prominent black politicians. He had the FBI report on Walter Jenkins. He had (Spiro) Agnew's phone calls monitored." None of this came out during the hearings.

3. We heard many sermons during the hearings about the violation of people's rights, but Thompson's account of the committee's own staff's treatment of Bebe Rebozo is an eye-opener. He was interviewed dozens of times, often for hours. The members of his family were interrogated. Everyone who had done business with Rebozo for the previous six years had his records subpoenaed. Anyone Rebozo had written a check to for six years was interrogated. His Miami bank was "staked out," and its employees harassed.