

Sirica in '76? Judge says

By Sydney Kossen
Political Editor

In a coastal corner of California one day last month, a group of Democrats and Republicans shuddered at the prospect of voting for a shopworn or mediocre politician for president next year.

They decided to draft John J. Sirica, the federal judge who — disregarding political overtones — pursued the truth in the Watergate trial two years ago.

The nonpartisan Sirica-for-President effort went public in Eureka four weeks ago. Before long it had committees in seven California counties and five other states.

Sacks of fan mail soon piled up in Sirica's Washington office. The surprised judge wanted no part of it.

Sirica made his displeasure known the other day in a cease-and-desist telegram from his secretary to the Humboldt County volunteers. She said the judge "expects immediate compliance. Thank you."

"If this is what he wants, we won't do another thing," James "Pat" Hanratty said in an interview from Eureka. Perhaps with Ronald Reagan in mind, Hanratty added:

"As a federal judge he can't act like an ordinary 'noncandidate.' We don't want to embarrass him and have those Watergate things go up on appeal.

"But we think we've started something. There's still a good chance he could be drafted. I don't think he's aware yet that his name is a household word."

Hanratty, a map publisher, started the campaign with Barbara Richter of Arcata. He's a Democrat; she's a Republican.

Both ran for Congress last year. Both failed to scale the primary and Republican Don Clausen was re-elected.

Most of about 50 other volunteers for Sirica said, they had never before been active in politics.

"We kept running out of stamps. Everything was donated," Hanratty said.

"We contacted friends and relatives in 30 states. A lot of the mailing was just shotgun — like we'd go to the library and get a Syracuse phone book. We'd say, 'Let's mail it to all the plumbers in Syracuse. They talk to a lot of people.'

"In Florida, we mailed it to barbers because Sirica's father was a barber. We did that from the yellow sections.

"We used the white sections, too, like in California for the town of Willows."

The barbers, plumbers, farmers, dock workers and others were urged to write directly to the judge because, "we weren't big enough to handle the response."

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no to grassroots drive

"Now," Hanratty said, "we couldn't turn off that volume of mail that's going into Sirica if we wanted to."

The fact that the judge is a 71-year-old lifelong Republican "doesn't matter," he contended.

He recalled that Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower had been a Democrat and was elected president as a Republican.

"Age? What's the right age? Was Nixon too young or too old when he was elected?"

"The people are sick and tired of politicians who compromise all the time. There's a crisis of

confidence."

Hanratty and friends say in their mimeographed letter that Sirica is not the only honest man, but he's one with national stature — a "symbol of the rectitude which distinguished public men in the early years of our republic and to which we must return. . ."

One of their committees had been formed in New Hampshire. They had hoped to enter Sirica's name as both a Republican and Democratic write-in candidate in the nation's first presidential primary Feb. 24.

They had expected a big write-in response in other state primaries, too — and finally a convention draft next summer by either Republicans or Democrats.