

By **TERRY ROBARDS**

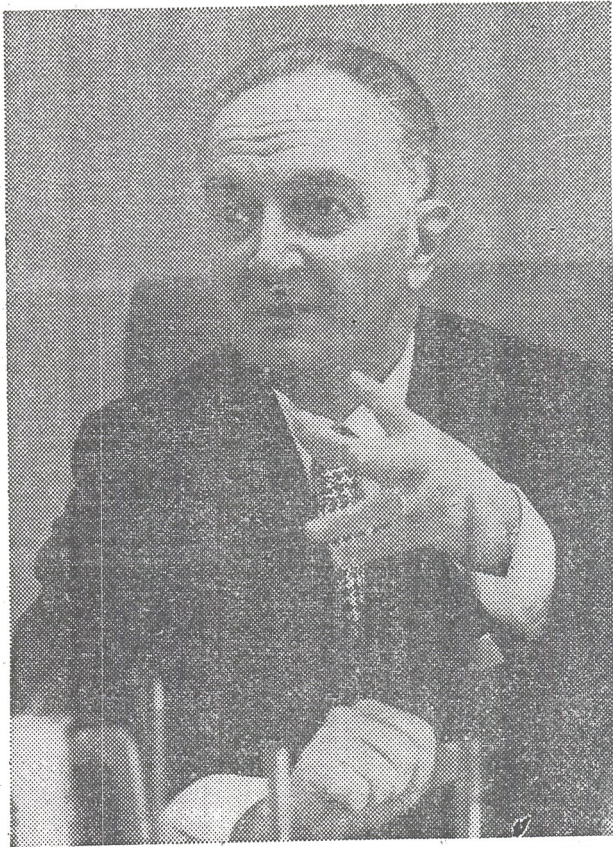
Michele Sindona, the fugitive financier who says he "lost everything" in the collapse of the Franklin National Bank and other parts of his business empire, is quietly leading a life far above the poverty level from a new base of operations in New York.

He says he has friends in Italy who send him money, enabling him to maintain his cooperative apartment at the Hotel Pierre, operate a modest suite of offices at 450 Park Avenue and retain Mudge, Rose, Guthrie & Alexander, the New York law firm, to defend him.

The firm is the one in which former President Richard M. Nixon and former Attorney General John N. Mitchell were partners. The Pierre is one of the most elegant residential hotels in New York, and the Park Avenue office tower is in the most fashionable part of town.

"Imagine my psychological position," he said in an interview. "I was one of the richest men in Italy and in 24 hours they took everything." He spoke English in the

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The New York Times/Robert Walker

Michele Sindona during interview at his office here

heavy Italian accent of his native Sicily.

His three-piece charcoal gray suit was conservative, and there was nothing pretentious about the blue-carpeted office behind an anonymous door on the 28th floor of the Park Avenue building. His bilingual secretary sat in one of the two other offices in the suite. The third appeared empty.

"She is working for the lawyers 80 percent, 90 percent of the time," Mr. Sindona said of his secretary. He explained that his lawyers have agreed to wait 15 days to one month to receive the periodic payment of their fees, to give him time to obtain the money from his friends in Italy.

"I cannot go back to Italy because I am under warrant for arrest," he said. "They are destroying everything that was mine — all my assets."

The financier, who controlled 22 percent of the Franklin National Bank when it was ruled insolvent in 1974, is wanted on two arrest warrants issued in

Milan just before he fled Italy a year ago. Efforts by the Italian Government to obtain his extradition have so far been unsuccessful.

The charges relate to allegedly falsified records and fraudulent bankruptcy in connection with the Sindona banking and industrial interests based in Milan. Mr. Sindona has been sued by the Securities and Exchange Commission in this country on fraud charges allegedly involving filing false information on Franklin.

Earlier this week Milan's public prosecutor, Guido Viola, arrived in New York with Ovilio Urbisci, a Milan investigating magistrate who is looking into some of the charges against the Italian financier. They were expected to renew efforts to obtain his extradition.

Although Mr. Sindona controlled corporate or banking interests in Luxembourg, Liechtenstein and Switzerland, as well as here and in Italy, he maintained yesterday that he had lost control of all of these assets through the Italian Government's seizure of his principal holdings in Italy. The value of his holdings was estimated at \$450 million.

He operated through a variety of banks and holding companies, which he either owned outright or controlled. The principal entities were the Banca Privata Italiana, forcibly liquidated in September 1974 after losses estimated at \$250 million, and Fasco A. G., a company based in Liechtenstein.

'Enemies a Factor'

"They want to put me in jail and brainwash me and maintain me there for 20 years," said Mr. Sindona, contending that he would not be treated with justice if he returned. Asked who "they" might be, he answered, "My enemies in Italy — the leftists."

The 55-year-old financier continued. "They talk to me about suicide as the best thing." He explained that he had received "anonymous telephones, anonymous letters" suggesting that he take his own life.

His troubles began, he said, with his staunch advocacy of free enterprise in Italy in the face of leftist opposition. "I started my fight with them when they started to nationalize electric power," he said. "There is no strong govern-

ment," he continued, "it's completely leftist."

In recent months Mr. Sindona has been on the university lecture circuit, giving talks at Harvard, the University of Chicago, U.C.L.A. and the University of Minnesota.

His topic is always international economics, he said, and he receives no payments for his speeches. He said he hoped to obtain investment clients by building a reputation as an authority on economics. He has retained public relations counsel to help promote his speaking engagements.

Aid to Defense Seen

Wall Street observers have suggested privately that Mr. Sindona is attempting to enhance his public image in the hope of aiding his defense against the S.E.C. allegations and other actions pending against him.

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation is seeking to recover \$15 million in funds that it contends were funneled from the Franklin National Bank to other Sindona-controlled banks in Europe during the two years before Franklin was ruled insolvent in October 1974.

Eight former officers and employees of Franklin were indicted last August on Federal charges involving the loss of some \$30 million at Franklin in connection with unauthorized foreign exchange trading. Mr. Sindona was not named in the indictment, although several former close associates were.

Sources close to the continuing investigations into what happened at Franklin National suggest that the financier has avoided extradition to Italy because his presence in this country may prove valuable in obtaining information.

Unanswered questions remain concerning Mr. Sindona's efforts to make a \$1 million anonymous campaign contribution to President Nixon's Committee to Reelect the President in 1972. The offer was withdrawn when Mr. Sindona was told the gift could not be anonymous.

He said in the interview the other day that the intended gift was on behalf of "friends" in Italy, not himself, and that the purpose had been to promote Italian-American relations. "No political man in the world can say I asked him for a cent or a favor," Mr. Sindona said.