

H. L. Hunt Accused by Ex-Aides

By Jack Anderson
and Les Whitten

H. L. Hunt, the eccentric oil billionaire, kept a tight lock during his life on a Pandora's box. When he died a few weeks ago at age 85, the lid was lifted for us.

What was found, attested to in a suppressed court document, is an incredible tale of bribery, infidelity, corruption, tax cheating, political manipulation and worse.

The charges were brought by two of the old tycoon's closest associates—his former personal assistant, John Curington, and trusted corporate aide, John Brown.

Both have now been indicted for allegedly siphoning off funds from the Hunt empire. But their charges, made jointly under oath, shouldn't be dismissed without an investigation.

Haroldson Lafayette Hunt was a crusty curmudgeon, who liked to boast he was "the richest man in the world" but who had a reputation as a skinflint. He packed his lunch to his office in a brown paper sack and spread wholewheat sandwiches and dried prunes on his desk, using *The Wall Street Journal* for a tablecloth.

But the secret life of the oil billionaire, according to Curington and Brown, was a different story. They portray him as a big-stakes gambler who squandered money to gratify his hates. Among his victims were

some of the biggest names in American politics.

The story was buried in the legal filings of a 1970 lawsuit. After Curington and Brown made their charges, the suit was settled and the sworn statements were withdrawn. But we have obtained copies of the suppressed material. Among the allegations are these:

- That Hunt "spent huge sums of cash" to mail out "an attack on John F. Kennedy and the Roman Catholic Church."

- That Hunt furnished cash to "a leading anti-Semitic propagandist . . . with instructions for the funds to be used to create an unfavorable image for Jews."

- That the oilman "spent large sums of cash" to defeat the late Lyndon B. Johnson, Sens. Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.), J. W. Fulbright (D-Ark.) and Alan Cranston (D-Calif.). The document charges Hunt's corporate funds and employees were used for political purposes.

- That Hunt cash went to Richard M. Nixon. This secret financing, it has been reported elsewhere, helped to put Nixon into the vice presidency in 1952.

- That Hunt money was behind the George Wallace-Curtis LeMay third-party ticket in 1968. One estimate puts the Hunt contribution at \$1 million.

- That Hunt had a "confidential and clandestine transaction" with Federal Communications Commissioner Robert E. Lee. In their testimony, a lawyer quotes Curington as saying Hunt rewarded the commis-

sioner for helping with his right-wing Life Line broadcasts. Lee acknowledged that he and Hunt were "pretty good friends" and that Hunt frequently called him, once about employees for Life Line. But Lee said all he ever got from Hunt was a quart of pecans one Christmas. "There were no business dealings," said the FCC commissioner.

- That Hunt once admitted he had "stolen in excess of \$8 million from himself," using Swiss bank accounts. He allegedly told the tax collectors he lost it gambling.

- That the billionaire used his employees to try to collect an \$800,000 gambling debt from a Nevada casino owner, then used employees to protect him "from notorious gambler Frank Erickson, who claimed H. L. Hunt owed him \$430,000." Hunt once claimed he bet \$125,000 with Erickson on a single football game.

- That Hunt's employees were required to recruit women to travel with him, to explain away his infidelities and to straighten out a scandal involving a relative and a prominent Texas matron.

- That Hunt sold food from his HLH product line "unfit for human consumption, knowing that such sales would end up in Negro and low-income areas."

- That Hunt used illegal Mexican labor at his "Indian Hot Springs Resort in Hudspeth County, Tex.," and diverted company funds to the private use of his family.

- That Hunt made "gifts to public officials in return for favors." He allegedly also charged off as company expenses favor-currying gifts to both Arab and Jewish groups.

- That Hunt compelled a bank and other business firms "which did business with Hunt Oil Company to make certain kickbacks." In some cases, Hunt required them to contribute to his right-wing foundation and his Life Line broadcasts, his former associates allege.

- That the billionaire paid off "certain key food buyers for chain stores . . . to induce them to buy HLH products."

- That Hunt diverted \$70 million from his oil firm to pay for his food company, which then advertised in his right-wing publications.

- That Hunt operated a bookie joint and chiseled the Internal Revenue Service for \$11 million in taxes. Once he allegedly helped a former employee dodge a subpoena for a grand jury, which was investigating Hunt's gambling.

A Hunt spokesman pointed to Curington and Brown's current indictment as argument that they couldn't be trusted to tell the truth about the Hunts. The spokesman contended their accusations were untrue and should be classified as "smut."

But the detailed charges are part of the Texas scandal that has entangled many of the oil curmudgeon's survivors.