

The Washington Merry-Go-Round

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'Obstruction' Eyed in Anti-Nixon Case

By Jack Anderson

The Watergate prosecutors believe their best case against President Nixon personally would be for "obstruction of justice." They have evidence that he tried to cover up the burglarizing of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist. No decision has been made, however, to bring charges against him.

The President repeatedly has tried to block inquiries into the White House plumbers' operation in the name of national security. Presidential aides have told the prosecutors, in deep confidence, that an investigation of the plumbers might reveal that the Central Intelligence Agency eavesdrops on Kremlin leaders.

This is no secret, however, to our readers. We reported as far back as Sept. 16, 1971, that "the CIA has been able to listen to the kinnpins of the Kremlin banter, bicker and backbite among themselves."

We went ahead with the story because the secret transcripts of the Kremlin conversations showed that the Soviet leaders were quite aware the CIA was listening to them. Anything the Kremlin leaders knew, we reasoned, was safe for the American people to be told.

The Kremlin eavesdropping, however, has been the principal excuse that the White House has

offered for shushing up the Ellsberg break-in. The burglary was committed by the plumbers, presidential aides told the prosecutors, not to seek a psychological profile of Ellsberg as the public has been told but to learn the names of Ellsberg's suspected Soviet contacts.

The White House feared Ellsberg had information about the CIA's listening devices in the Kremlin and might tip off his alleged Soviet contacts, claimed the President's people. They had reason to believe Ellsberg had named his Soviet contacts, they said, during his sessions with his psychiatrist.

When Assistant Attorney General Henry Petersen discussed the Ellsberg break-in with the President, according to Petersen's account of the conversation, Mr. Nixon warned him: "That is a national security matter. You stay out of that. Your mandate is to investigate Watergate."

The new special prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, has told Senators he doesn't agree with this and will go ahead with an investigation of the plumbers' activities. These include two mysterious missions known only as "Project Odessa" and "Project M-1." White House aides won't even discuss these missions with the prosecutors, although they have promised to let Jawor-

ski see documents and listen to tapes relating to the national security problem.

Some prosecutors suspect that the President has gone to extreme lengths to cover up the plumbers' activities because of his own personal involvement. He not only has admitted that he "approved the creation" of the para-police plumbers unit but that he "directed" Petersen not to investigate the plumbers' activities.

In the opinion of the prosecutors, this could be construed as obstruction of justice. For subsequent investigations, which were conducted despite the President's wishes, have resulted in criminal indictments.

The prosecutors are also seeking to determine whether the President ordered the former head of the plumbers, Egil Krogh, to obstruct the investigation. Krogh's attorney, Stephen Shulman, has told the court that his client was ordered to lie, if necessary, to conceal the plumbers' operations.

The White House has acknowledged that Mr. Nixon asked the late FBI chief, J. Edgar Hoover, to direct the illegal activities that were later entrusted to the plumbers. Yet the President has insisted that he "at no time authorized the use of illegal means by the special investigations unit."

The President has denied specifically that he had any advance knowledge of the burglary of Ellsberg's psychiatrist. Not until last March 17, he said, did he learn about the break-in.

The moment former Watergate prosecutor Earl Silbert learned about the break-in, he immediately informed the court. But the President concealed this crime for more than a month, by his own admission, until then Attorney General Richard Kleindienst persuaded him on April 25 to disclose it to the court.

From the beginning, the President has resisted any probe of the plumbers. It was this phase of Archibald Cox's investigation, according to our White House sources, that raised the President's hackles. Now Jaworski is continuing where Cox left off.

The President is upset over Jaworski's attitude but doesn't want to appear to be obstructing another special prosecutor, say our sources.

Jaworski, meanwhile, not only has kept Cox's aggressive young prosecutors but has directed them to go ahead with all their investigations. To the dismay of the White House, it is beginning to look as if President Nixon may have another Archibald Cox on his hands.

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