Ford retains Connally on staff despite indictment

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The Ford Administration has allowed a former Cabinet Secretary, indicted by a Watergate grand jury, to remain in a sensitive government position.

Former Treasury Secretary John B. Connally has maintained his position and security clearance as a member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB), even though he was indicted on July 24, 1974, by a Washington, D.C., grand jury directed by the Watergate special/prosecution force. The former Texas governor has been charged with accepting an illegal payment, one count of conspiracy to commit perjury or obstruct justice, and two counts of making a false declaration before a grand jury.

Connally's indictment resulted from a special prosecution investigation of illegal contributions to the 1972 Nixon re-election campaign by the American Milk Producers Association and other dairy industry groups. Connally, a Democrat, was a noted economist who was known as a good friend of the late President Johnson, headed the "Democrats for Nixon" campaign group in 1972.

The PFIAB, which meets on the first Thursday and Friday of alternate months, is charged with advising "the President concerning the objectives, conduct, management, and coordination of the various activities making up the overall national intelligence effort" and with conducting "a continuing review and assessment of foreign intelligence and related activities which the Central Intelligence Agency and other government departments and agencies are engaged." According to PFIAB Executive Secretary Whitson Byers, Connally last attended a meeting of the board on February, 1974, and received the standard $200 salary, plus payments for transportation and other expenses for his attendance at the meetings.

On April 17, 1973, former President Richard M. Nixon, as part of the attempted Watergate cover-up, declared the following policy for his Administration with respect to government service by indicted persons: "If any person in the Executive Branch, or in the government is indicted by the grand jury, my policy will be to immediately suspend him. If he is convicted, he will, of course, be automatically discharged." This policy was never tested, as all indicted Nixon aides had left their government jobs prior to being indicted.

But the policy remained in effect until Nixon's resignation in August, 1974. Various White House sources were contacted in an effort to determine the Ford Administration policy with respect to employment of indicted persons.

Deputy President Press Secretary John W. Hinson confirmed that President Ford knows of the Connally situation and has not done anything about it. Counselor to the President Philip W. Buchen told this reporter that he was checking into the matter and knew of no established Ford policy. Buchen refused phone calls on Thursday and Friday of last week, and his office would not say if Buchen's "checking" process had been completed.

Connally was unavailable for comment, but his personal secretary in his Houston office confirmed that he has not resigned his post on the PFIAB. His secretary added that any further comment would be inappropriate.

Because the PFIAB oversees the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), an effort was made to determine what effect an indictment would have on the employment and security clearances of an agency employee. A CIA spokesman, who asked not to be identified, stated that the CIA had no policy on the question, because no CIA employee had ever been indicted while in the employ of the agency. The spokesman said the connally White House's order had advised him that the agency would follow Ford policy. If an indicted would depend on the nature of the crime. He indicated that an indictment in a non-classified matter could not be considered as serious as an indictment for passing classified material to a foreign power.

CIA and freedom

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done by the Special Operations Division of the CIA's Counterintelligence Branch.

Counterintelligence could loosely be defined as the attempt to foil the activities of foreign intelligence services which are attempting to gather information about one's own nation (e.g., the details of a weapon system) or to disrupt the operation of one's own intelligence service (e.g., placing a foreign spy within the CIA). There is no prohibition in US laws which would preclude the CIA from performing this function outside the US. Inside the US, the counterintelligence mission with respect to civilians is within the exclusive jurisdiction of the FBI. Although the CIA and FBI may conduct joint operations abroad, the CIA at home is limited to furnishing information to the FBI upon which latter agency can act.

The main questions as of this writing are: 1) Who authorized the alleged illegal CIA activity? and 2) Why did the person or persons authorizing the alleged illegal activity do it?

Former President Richard Nixon may have authorized the activity either for political purposes (i.e., to either the President's anti-war and anti-Administration views and activities) or because he could no longer control the FBI.

Richard Helms, then CIA Director and current US Ambassador to Iran, could have ordered that activity by himself although it seems unlikely that Helms would have acted without approval from either Nixon or Secretary of State and National Security Advisor to the President Henry Kissinger. The legislation giving the CIA its charter contains a catchall phrase which gives the CIA Director the mission of protecting intelligence sources and methods. At times, the CIA has used this authority to justify just about anything including its involvement in Watergate. Thus, Helms may have felt that he had to act to protect his sources against domestic threats perceived by the Agency's operation.

The final and most shocking explanation is that James Angleton, Director of CIA Counterintelligence, until he resigned the day after Hersh's article appeared, may have decided to undertake the illegal activity by himself. Angleton's job was to protect the CIA from infiltration by foreign intelligence services. Thus, he was in a position to accuse anyone within the CIA and perhaps anyone within the US Government of being a foreign intelligence agent. He was the Special Operations division, allowed no one to have anything to do with Angleton didn't trust, and then explicitly or implicitly threatened the curious with the loss of their jobs. He was also able to set up his own secret police force.

If the allegations can be proven, it would be obvious that the checks and balances which were supposed to restrain the CIA failed. Why? Apparently the offices were too light because younger members of the intelligence community felt that the whistle on Angleton's operation apparently by talking to Hersh, it is unfortunate that it was necessary to go outside the formal apparatus to correct this abuse. Yet it is fortunate that the First Amendment protects the freedom of the press which made possible the revelation of the illegal activity. This experience could guarantee to his sources anonymity and hence freedom from reprisal in the form of rapid unemployment.

The Selling of the Vice Presidency, 1974?

In (Belated) Honor of the Accession of Nelson A. Rockefeller to the Vice Presidency of the United States

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[Image of a newspaper page with text about the selling of the vice presidency, 1974.]