

Conversation Number 342-27
June 20, 1972, 2:20 P.M.-3:30 P.M.
Executive Office Building
President and Colson

COLSON: Sir.

PRESIDENT: Hi. Now I hope everybody is not going to get into a tizzy about the Democratic Committee.

COLSON: It's a little, it's a little frustrating. Disheartening, I guess, is the right word.

PRESIDENT: Well.

COLSON: Pick up that God damn Washington Post. [sounds like Colson is seating himself as he says this] See the guilt by association.

PRESIDENT: Yeah. About you?

COLSON: Yeah. I, this is, I haven't seen him in three months. Been off our payroll for three months.

PRESIDENT: Well, don't worry about it, personally. That's, that's just one of those things.

COLSON: No, I've learned a lesson from you in that regard, I must say that—

PRESIDENT: Can't rule out the fact it happened. Oh, well.

COLSON: The family reads that; they knew I was going to be—

PRESIDENT: [Yeah,] really sick.

COLSON: They said, "Were you involved in this business?"

PRESIDENT: Yeah, [wouldn't they think you'd have a hard time explaining it to President Nixon?] Do they think I'm that dumb?

COLSON: You're not dumb. [unclear] It wasn't quite that way.

PRESIDENT: Well, don't worry about that.

COLSON: Well, I don't think it's, it's even less than IT and T, and it's the kind of thing that nobody in the country—

PRESIDENT: [unclear] [Won't care.]

COLSON: No.

PRESIDENT: Well, a lot of people think you ought to wiretap.

COLSON: Well, they, I'm, I'm sure most people—

PRESIDENT: Or knew why the hell we're doing it. They probably figure they're doing it to us, which they are.

COLSON: Most people figure that, uh, political parties spy on each other and that's part of the problem. [unclear] Spying—

PRESIDENT: That's why, that's why they hired this guy in the first place, to sweep the rooms, didn't they?

COLSON: Yes sir. Frankly, sir, I haven't gotten into the, all the details that we want to on this. But I assume he was hired to protect their own offices.

PRESIDENT: Well, they'd better. Better have someone. You know, they have, ah, Bob did [a real quickie] on Choitner. Choitner has some guy with McGovern, aides he had on the road, the plane, the bus. I just said to Bob: Get it out, make a good story. Get it out.

COLSON: They've, they've known most of our [arguments] ahead of time, [so it seems.]

PRESIDENT: Either these guys bugged us, [unclear] or we've got a God damn person over there that's ratting on us. What do you think?

COLSON: I think its, I think it's, undoubtedly, [the latter.]

PRESIDENT: Who do you think—

COLSON: You never know.

PRESIDENT: You say who? I don't know who the hell it would be. Some disgruntled [person] or somebody they planted.

COLSON: Or it could be his secretary.

PRESIDENT: Well, secretaries do it, not that you pay them [much.]

COLSON: Sure. There, there's no way you can guard against that kind of thing. The only thing you can do is be...

PRESIDENT: [We can] be sure of all of the White House, of course.

COLSON: Well, I think—oh sure, I mean, that's the kind of thing—

PRESIDENT: At least the ones that are investigated, I know.

COLSON: Oh yeah.

PRESIDENT: I mean like, ah, the ones we have over there, according to Marge, Yates's girl, Buz Yates, Yates and [Beverly] both worked for Johnson. So did [Katy.] But, oh hell, they're all right.

COLSON: Those, those kind of people, I think you can tell a person from the way—

PRESIDENT: I, I think so. They don't look that, well—

COLSON: I know, I know my gal's been with me long enough that [unclear]. But that's the kind of thing you can never be sure of.

PRESIDENT: On this thing here, [said in a declarative tone, and then almost whispering the rest of his thought] I, uh, I've got to, well, it's a dangerous job.

COLSON: Well, Bob is pulling it all together. Thus far, I think we've done this, I think, I think we've done the right things to date.

PRESIDENT: I think the real question is whether, uh, we want to [remain with the people charged, whether they hold up. I understand,] basically, they're all pretty hard line guys.

COLSON: Yes, sir.

PRESIDENT: Or if we are going to have this funny guy take credit for that.

COLSON: You mean the one, Hunt?

PRESIDENT: [And Liddy, in addition to Hunt.]

COLSON: 'Course I, I can't believe he's involved. I think, ah, he's, he's, he's too smart to do it this way, he's just too damned shrewd.

PRESIDENT: [unclear] very involved.

COLSON: Too much sophisticated techniques. You don't have to get into [unclear] with heavy equipment like that. Put it in the ceiling. Hell of a lot easier way.

PRESIDENT: It doesn't sound like a, a skillful job. [unclear] If we didn't know better, would have thought it was deliberately butchered.

COLSON: Yeah, I thought of that this weekend. And, uh, then I, then I figured, uh, maybe it's the Cubans that did it. Organizing it on their own, because you know they had, uh— [coughs]

PRESIDENT: I just, just feel very strongly—

COLSON: Oh, Jesus, I just talked to Clawson. He said you know we should [unclear]—

PRESIDENT: I saw a paper when I was in there. It says: Kennedy, uh, public enemy number one for Cuban [community.]

COLSON: Oh, they're violent. Well, you know, Mr. President, most of them, you want me to get that?

PRESIDENT: Why don't you get that, why don't you get that paper? Ah, up, ah, Rebozo had it on his, uh, desk. It's the last pub, the last issue, of the Cuban paper. Public, ah, public enemy number one.

COLSON: They hate him, of course, they hate McGovern because he's Kennedy's [unclear], for Christ's sake. You know, if we were to recognize Castro and he was the man who returned the Cuban Nationals, a lot of these guys who were, who were, would be considered fugitives from Cuba. They don't know where to get political asylum.

PRESIDENT: [Really?]

COLSON: That's right.

PRESIDENT: What's he say? Jesus Christ.

COLSON: Well.

PRESIDENT: We pay a price. McGovern would do it in a minute.

COLSON: You, he—put yourself in their shoes, when you think that, uh, that they're sitting here thinking, God, that's not what [unclear]. He may be take them back to a firing squad in Havana. They're going to resort to some pretty serious—

PRESIDENT: Well, the Post, obviously, would be in a hell of a fight on that, and it will rub off on some others. But I cannot believe that the press, as vicious as it is, [will] be able to make this an issue that'll stay or last, you know what I mean, [huh]?

COLSON: The Post story is the front page in Boston this morning, in the Boston Globe. They've got some [unclear] large pictures, so I called a few people up there this morning, and nobody's seen it. And those who had seen it said, "Oh, Christ, it didn't say anything." I don't think people pay attention.

PRESIDENT: I read the story. But, uh, of course I knew about Hunt from the Post. What the hell does it prove? That he had somebody, had your number in a book, so that's, what the hell does that prove? [They] probably had mine.

COLSON: They had Howard Hunt's number, not mine.

PRESIDENT: That's right, but Hunt was, uh...

COLSON: Did you read that story? Now, that was a brilliantly written piece of, uh, political knavery, because the first time you read it you think they had my number, and then you read it again and it's Howard Hunt's.

PRESIDENT: Well, Howard Hunt's, but how did we get you in there?

COLSON: Well, Howard Hunt was here as a consultant and they wrote him in.

PRESIDENT: Oh yeah. Well, I said to him, I don't suppose any of our guys [unclear] will get a Pulitzer Prize for this.

COLSON: Probably.

PRESIDENT: [Laughs]. No, no, no, you know what I mean, the guy that broke in—

COLSON: Oh, oh.

PRESIDENT: —for Christ sakes, they gave the Times the Pulitzer Prize, they gave Anderson a Pulitzer Prize. In other words, stealing documents and publishing [documents] belonging to the Government, top secret, shit, uh, who did, did any of these people squeal about that then?

COLSON: Yeah, isn't that true.

PRESIDENT: That's my point. Did McGovern, did the Times, did the Post squeal about that then? Now here was an attempted theft that failed, against a political party, not against the government of the United States. They give Pulitzer Prizes for publishing stolen documents. Now let's get at a, I think, a hell of a tough speech.

COLSON: That's right, if, if you steal classified Government documents and print them in a newspaper, you get a Pulitzer Prize.

PRESIDENT: Right. And don't—

COLSON: You break in a political party headquarters, and you get pilloried.

PRESIDENT: That's great, great. Well, that should do it. [unclear] We are just going to leave this where it is, with the Cubans. I heard [unclear] happens to be the most

[unclear].

COLSON: I think that's the only thing you can do. Just let it, just let it [unclear]. The fact that they had Hunt's name was the most logical thing in the world because he ran and trained the chief of brigade that went to the Bay of Pigs. He's the fellow that came up and, and cried at John Kennedy's office to send a second wave.

PRESIDENT: [unclear]

COLSON: Bill Buckley is his children's godfather. He's a very hard-right, hard-running guy.

PRESIDENT: Buckley's the kind to write the story.

COLSON: Buckley's the guy to do this one.

PRESIDENT: I hope to Christ that he's got [unclear]. They get Hunt for trying? It's a double standard. I'm not going to worry about it. I've, ah, sh—the hell with it. Well, let it fly, we're not going to react to it that way. We're gonna, we've worked hard on that [unclear].

COLSON: What else could we do, [overlook?] No basis for that. Larry O'Brien has sued for invasion of privacy. That's, that's, that's libel in my book. That's libel. That isn't—

PRESIDENT: When will that get up?

COLSON: Well, they, they brought the suit today, it was announced they were bringing the suit today [by] the attorneys. I don't think that'll be dismissed for lack of [unclear]. But the, the, uh, you know, it's a great Washington story, because Washington just thrives on intrigue and spies and suspense.

PRESIDENT: Oh, sure.

COLSON: As you know, a political fight here.

PRESIDENT: Where in the hell, now where the hell are all these leaks from our side coming from? Now let's put that aside. [unclear] You know damn well, there, you're, you're either bugged or disloyal, or thievery are common par for the course. You don't have to prove a bugging count.

COLSON: Of course, the thing we have to guard against, Mr. President, is the idea of repeating the ITT mistake. Now, we were riding so damned high and I guess we couldn't do much about it, but they dragged us into it. But the press, the media and the Democrats are so God damn desperate that any issue that they can lay their hands on, that it's something which normally wouldn't amount to that much. They're just going to blow the hell out it, because they haven't got any other place they can lay a glove on us.

And that was the case with ITT, which came after China, the economy was picking up, wage-price controls were working, they had nothing, so they went into ITT viciously.

PRESIDENT: Sure. [unclear, when Colson coughs]

COLSON: I think they'll try to. You can't, you can't make a case out of this the way you could out of ITT. The weakness in ITT was that it fed the public suspicion that the Republicans are dedicated to big business.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, I know, it's \$400,000 and all that and so forth. But here it is, they're just trying, let the Committee try to find out what the others doing [unclear].

COLSON: I think people expect it. I really do. I think they expect it. The trouble is—

PRESIDENT: The mistake would be what? Responding?

COLSON: Mistake would be to get all of them zeroed in on it.

PRESIDENT: Oh.

COLSON: Make a big case out of it.

PRESIDENT: Oh shit, that's right. I couldn't agree more.

COLSON: Go after it day in and day out.

PRESIDENT: Yeah.

COLSON: Follow the every lead, uh, I'd say the hell with it, believe me.

PRESIDENT: Yeah, got to, and keep your people all away from it. [unclear]

COLSON: This is good. This is a [right on.] This hits at the media in a way that they would not have expected.

PRESIDENT: That's right. It couldn't be very hard.

COLSON: Sure these fellas are—

PPRESIDNET: ...just in there trying to win the Pulitzer Prize.

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