

Probe of Ford Role in Blocking '72 Watergate Inquiry Rejected

P. 62t 10/16/76
Watergate Special Prosecutor Charles F. Ruff yesterday rejected demands by some members of Congress Ruff said there was no indication of role in blocking a 1972 House inquiry into the Watergate scandal.

Ruff said there was no indication of criminal intent in the political maneuvering that took place between Capitol Hill and aides of then-President Nixon. He also maintained that the question of whether Ford might have perjured himself about the matter during his 1973 vice presidential confirmation hearings would be under the regular jurisdiction of the Justice Department and not his office.

Rep. Elizabeth Holtzman (D-N.Y.), one of the House members who had called for an investigation, denounced Ruff's decision as "highly regrettable" and "inexcusable."

The new investigation had been sought in light of recent assertions by former White House counsel John W. Dean III, who said Ford, then House Minority Leader, had been in frequent contact with White House aide

Richard Cook about stopping the 1972 probe.

Under questioning at his confirmation hearing in the fall of 1973, Ford insisted that he opposed the abortive investigation on his own and said repeatedly that he could not recall discussing the issue with anyone from the White House.

The short-lived investigation into the laundering of funds for the Watergate burglars was conducted by the staff of the House Banking Committee under Chairman Wright Patman (D-Tex.), but it was squelched on Oct. 3, 1972, by a formal committee vote of 20 to 15. Fourteen Republicans and six Democrats killed the investigation by denying it the requisite subpoena power.

Ruff said Watergate prosecutors in charge of the cover-up investigation had given "some consideration to the implications of White House efforts to prevent the issuance of subpoenas by the committee" but determined that there was insufficient evidence of criminal intent.