

Dispute On Data Goes On

Hill Leaders, Ford Confer On Documents

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President Ford met with the chairman of the House intelligence committee and other congressional leaders yesterday to discuss the impasse over the handling of secret government documents.

White House press secretary Ron Nessen said that Mr. Ford considered the 1½-hour meeting "most constructive and useful," but Nessen would not indicate whether any agreement had been reached.

Chairman Otis G. Pike said later that "we are still in substantial disagreement on a large number of issues" involving his committee's investigation of U.S. intelligence agencies.

The New York Democrat said he felt that the committee and the administration had drawn closer together on the release of classified information, but that they were still at odds over an edict that would sharply restrict the committee's questioning of State Department witnesses.

House Republicans who attended the meeting were more optimistic, but Pike said he still planned to ask the committee's approval Monday of a resolution calling for a vote of confidence from the full House. The resolution would endorse the committee's efforts to get the information/needs from the executive branch without any strings attached.

"A few issues were reduced, but a few new ones appeared," Pike said after yesterday's meeting. "The President" is concerned about confrontation. He would like to work

things out his way."

The White House hurriedly initiated the meeting after Pike threatened contempt of Congress citations against Ford administration officials who continue to "obstruct and delay" the committee's investigations of the Central Intelligence Agency and the rest of the government's intelligence community.

Rep. Robert McClory (R-Ill.),

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the committee's ranking minority member, indicated that the President had agreed "to involve himself personally" and review any classified documents that the committee might want to make public over objections from the agencies.

But the underlying question of who would have the final say was apparently left unsettled. Asked what would happen if the President and the committee still disagreed over a particular document, McClory said: "We could get back to a confrontation."

McClory added, however, that he felt the odds of such a showdown would be "very remote" if the procedures discussed yesterday are adopted. "The President, I think, would go the last mile to make sure no wrongdoing, no incompetence is concealed," McClory said.

At the White House with the President were Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, CIA director William E. Colby, House Speaker Carl Albert (D-Okla.), House Minority Leader John J. Rhodes (R-Ariz.), White House advisers Donald Rumsfeld, Philip W. Buchen and John Q. Marsh Jr., and Reps. Pike and McClory.

White House and committee staff employees were assigned to work through the weekend on a draft agreement that could be submitted to the committee Monday.

Informed of McClory's opti-

mism, Pike recalled that McClory had also been optimistic last week about the committee's decision to give the administration 24 hours' notice of any plans to make sensitive documents public.

The rule was designed, reportedly at the suggestion of the White House, to give the intelligence agencies a chance to come in and explain their objections to any particular disclosures the committee wished to make. McClory had been hopeful that this would resolve the impasse, but it didn't.

The dispute began earlier this month when the committee voted to make public portions of subpoenaed U.S. intelligence reports on the eve of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, including a four-word phrase about the tightening of Egyptian communications security that the CIA wanted kept secret.

The President responded by demanding the return of all classified information already in the committee's hands and vowing to reproduce no more classified information unless the committee stopped asserting the right to make it public on its own.

Then on Thursday, the State Department's deputy under secretary for management, Lawrence S. Eagleburger, told the committee that department officials interviewed by Pike's committee had been instructed "to decline by order of the Secretary of State to give information which would disclose options considered by

or recommended to more senior officers in the Department of State."

Although Pike said no satisfactory headway had been made on this issue, House Republican leader Rhodes said he came away from yesterday's White House session with the feeling that the differences can be worked out.

Rhodes understood Kissinger to say that low-level State Department officials could testify voluntarily on recommendations they made to higher officials, but cannot be compelled to do so. By contrast, Eagleburger told the committee Thursday that all but the policy makers at the State Department—assistant secretaries and up—had been ordered not to testify about any recommendations they made.

Washington Post staff writers Peter Millus and Richard L. Lyons contributed to this article.