

Cox Finds No Improper Conduct In Handling of Abplanalp Case

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Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox said yesterday that he has uncovered "no evidence of improper conduct" in the Justice Department's veto of an antitrust investigation involving the Precision Valve Corp.

The country's biggest producer of aerosol valves, the company is owned by Robert H. Abplanalp, a close friend of President Nixon. The Antitrust Division of the Justice Department rejected a staff recommendation two years ago for an investigation of Precision Valve's pricing policies.

Cox notified Rep. Bertram Podell (D-N.Y.) that his staff conducted a "thorough investigation" of the incident, but found no improprieties.

"No evidence of improper conduct was found," Cox said. "Accordingly, we contemplate no further action."

Podell, who asked Cox to look into the case in July, had contended that the antitrust inquiry might have been scuttled as the result of political pressures on behalf of Abplan-

alp, the man who loaned Mr. Nixon \$625,000 in 1969 to help him buy his estate in San Clemente.

Cox said his investigation included review of the Antitrust Division's file and interviews conducted both by his staff and the FBI. But Podell remained skeptical.

"How comforting it is that suspicions can be put to rest that there was favoritism shown a man who loaned the President \$625,000 to buy a home, put an investment company together to buy most of that property back, canceled out the President's personal indebtedness, made large contributions to the President's political campaign, donated the use of his resort home and otherwise made considerable resources available for presidential use," the Brooklyn congressman said in a statement.

Abplanalp said he was "delighted" at Cox's public announcement of his findings.

"It erased any doubt that may have been cast on my integrity through a cheap shot by a congressman who created

a trumped-up charge on the eve of his indictment for an alleged violation of federal law," he said in a statement released through Precision Valve's offices in Yonkers.

Podell was indicted by a federal grand jury in New York July 12 on charges of conspiracy, perjury and bribery involving attempts to secure a regular Florida-Bahamas route for a now bankrupt Florida airline. Now awaiting trial, Podell asserted that the indictment was a White House attempt at "political assassination."

An aide indicated that Podell still plans to seek a congressional investigation.

Documents he disclosed last July 9, including a back-and-forth series of memos between officials in the Antitrust Division's New York office and in the division's headquarters here, indicated a lively debate over the proposed investigation of Precision Valve.

The Justice Department said the debate reflected nothing more than an honest disagreement about "the merits of the case."