

# White House Sought Probe of Ellsberg

By Jack Anderson

To drum up prejudice against Daniel Ellsberg while the government was preparing its case against him in 1971, the White House secretly asked a congressional committee to hold hearings on his theft of the Pentagon Papers.

The appeal for Ellsberg hearings was made by White House officials to the House Internal Security Committee through the office of its cagey chairman, Rep. Richard Ichord (D-Mo.), in June, 1971.

Ichord's aide, William Hecht, confirmed to us that a White House official called him and confided: "Some committee is going to investigate this matter. It should be one with genuine interest in the national security."

When several more pressing calls followed, Hecht began to wonder just who at the White House was so eager for the hearings.

"Is this something the President wants done?" Hecht inquired.

"Yes," was the immediate White House response.

Ichord cautioned his aide that with criminal charges pending against Ellsberg, he would not risk prejudicing the case with pre-trial publicity unless national security arguments were overwhelming.

"The only way I'd go ahead with this is if the President personally asked me," he instructed Hecht. Dutifully, the

staffer informed the White House. Sure enough, within days a call came to Ichord from his acquaintance in the Oval Office, Richard Nixon.

Footnote: Today, the shoe is tightly on the other foot. Ex-Nixon aides face prosecution in the Watergate debacle and are now loudly complaining that their own cases are being prejudiced by congressional hearings.

**Safety Sabotaged** — As chairman of a House committee on the infirm, hard-working Rep. John Brademas (D-Ind.) has labored for years to lift the burdens of the elderly, the crippled and the retarded.

But in private letters to the Department of Transportation, Brademas successfully opposed forcing bus manufacturers to make boarding safer for the aged and handicapped. Instead, he helped throw a \$24 million contract to his home-town bus firm which home-town bus firm, which safety measures.

To be fair, Brademas is a liberal from a conservative district where every one of 4,000 voters at AM General's vehicle plants in South Bend, Ind., cast a vital ballot. Moreover, South Bend still shudders over the Studebaker shutdown a decade ago which threw 7,000 workers out of jobs.

Though the 620-bus contract with Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority was

important for Brademas' district, it was also a watershed issue for the nation's disabled. WMATA, as the transit authority is called, was bravely trying to set national precedents to put bus steps closer to the ground and make them less steep.

In its first big eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation with the politically powerful bus makers — who do not want to change the design of their steep steps—WMATA blinked. Under pressure from GM and FLXIBLE, Rohr Industries' bus division, WMATA relaxed its standards for step-to-step distances from 9½ to 10 inches.

When AM General asked for still further relaxation, WMATA and its funding agency, the Department of Transportation, both stoutly refused to give another inch on the safety of the disabled.

Transportation bluntly told AM General that its proposals would cause "confusion and stumbling," particularly among "the elderly and handicapped." The result would be injuries for those least able to pay for hospitalization.

But on the very day that Transportation was rejecting AM General's spirited appeal, the company quietly summoned up Brademas, who is chief deputy House majority whip as well as chairman of a key health and education subcommittee.

Brademas swiftly moved to turn the decision around. He

called Transportation's mass transport czar, Frank Herringer, and on the same afternoon had his top aide, lawyer Jim Monney, pressure Herringer with a second call. Herringer agreed to a delay in opening bids.

Next day, Brademas hit Herringer with a letter asking for "your careful personal attention . . . in order to insure that AM General is given every consideration it is entitled to . . ."

Six days later, Brademas shot off another letter, this time asking for Herringer's "close personal attention to AM General's request . . ."

Next day, Transportation capitulated. It reversed its courageous stand of only a week before and informed AM General meekly that "WMATA has approved the redesign of AM General's steps."

Not surprisingly, with the specifications now tailored to AM General's measure, AM won the \$24 million contract. The losers, of course, were the tens of millions of elderly and handicapped who looked to Brademas for help.

Footnote: Brademas insisted that "providing a bus with substantial advantages for the elderly and the handicapped was never an issue." It was solely a matter of whether "WMATA would be allowed to use restrictive specifications to discriminate against AM General," he explained.