

# Nessen and Press Clash at Briefing

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A bitterness reminiscent of the Watergate era was displayed in the White House press room yesterday as charges of cover-up and evasion were hurled at press secretary Ron Nessen.

After an hour of sharp questioning, Nessen slammed his briefing book shut and marched out of the room—having just said that he had other announcements to make. They were never made.

The battle was over the reason why there was a delay in publication of the Rockefeller commission report on the Central Intelligence Agency. Vice President Rockefeller and other officials, including Nessen, had led reporters to believe that the report would be made available for this Sunday's newspapers.

Yesterday Nessen would say only that the President would read it and decide whether to make it public, but that it would not be made public this week.

Suspicious among the press were aroused late Thursday when a commission spokesman disclosed that the report would not cover the controversial issue of whether the CIA had been involved in assassination plots.

When reporters pressed Nessen on whether the White House was editing the report and whether parts would be suppressed, his temper, frequently short, began to rise.

When the questioning got tangled at one point, Nessen asked: "What are we talking about?"

"We're talking about a cover-up," a reporter replied.

Later, when Nessen had moved to another subject, he

interrupted himself and turned to a reporter who was muttering loudly on the sidelines. "Do you have something to add?" Nessen asked.

"We're probably leaving aside the crucial question here," replied the reporter, who frequently criticizes Nessen, "about whether former President Nixon was consulted in this cover-up."

"Which cover-up is that?" Nessen snapped, and returned to his other subject.

The press secretary had been questioned Thursday about a possible delay in publishing the report. And after Thursday night's announcement about what the report would not contain, the reporters were confident that Nessen was aware that it would be the chief subject of yesterday's briefing.

So, when Nessen failed to

respond to questions to the reporters' satisfaction, they appeared at first puzzled and then increasingly critical in follow-up questions.

One reporter asked Nessen if he had expected such a brouhaha, implying that the press secretary had failed to prepare himself for the questions he knew would be asked.

Nessen and those who help him prepare for the briefing knew that there were a variety of rumors going the rounds — that the document was too frank to suit the White House, that Philip W. Buchen, counsel to the President, had read the report and advised against publication, that criticisms of Rockefeller by Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho), chairman of the Senate committee on intelligence operations, had forced second thoughts about the report's reliability.