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*A Prudent Move by the Ervin Committee*Post
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The Senate select committee investigating the Watergate affair acted wisely, in our opinion, in deciding on Tuesday to eliminate all further pre-hearing testimony before the full committee—and it acted in the nick of time. Well, not *quite* in the nick, perhaps, but at least in time to prevent a serious erosion of the rights and protections owing those whose activities it intends to investigate and an equally serious erosion of its own integrity as an instrument of investigation. We commend Senator Ervin for taking the lead in this matter and for clarifying the present state of the committee's knowledge (or lack thereof) concerning a connection of Mr. Haldeman, the President's aide, with the Watergate burglary and other illegal activity. We also commend Senator Ervin for the spirit in which he apparently sought to end the flow of partial and uncheckable allegations by shortening the period of time that will elapse before the full, open hearings begin.

We say we commend the "spirit" of this latter move because, as investigations go, its actual wisdom can at least be subjected to question. For it is not obvious whether the soundness of the whole committee enterprise would be better served by an earlier date for the opening of the public hearings or by whatever delay might be required to provide sufficient time for the careful staff investigation that should precede the hearings themselves—investigative work which, it is fair to assume, must have been complicated by the unanticipated revelations of Mr. James McCord. Evidently Senator Ervin and his committee have decided that the more urgent requirement is that which would hold the open hearings earlier and thus curtail the familiar informal process of "shadow" hearings that has been under way for the past couple of weeks. (Presumably this decision can be altered if the committee decides the earlier date has not provided enough time.)

The process to which we refer, as those who have been in this town for any length of time well know, manages to combine the straight and the crooked, the legitimate and the specious motivation in such a way as to create a sort of Rube Goldberg engine of unverifiable charge and countercharge. Reporters have the valid responsibility to report public news—and allegations by public men concerning public business surely fit into that category. But the public men in this instance may have their own axes to grind and others may step in to deny their accounts of things, and finally the whole affair may do enormous harm to people's reputations and also to the public's opportunity ever to understand the real facts of the matter. Those facts can only emerge from a procedurally sound and fair hearing. That what we have been witnessing in the past couple of weeks is fairly commonplace where such hearings are concerned and that it does not necessarily proceed from evil intent on the part of all those along the conveyor belt, in no way lessens the desirability of cutting the process off. And that is what Senator Ervin clearly has in mind.

We hope he has Senator Weicker with him. The Connecticut Republican has been making quite a splash over the past few days, and in our estimation it has been regrettable. You hear it said that Mr. Weicker has good sources; you hear it said that he is genuinely outraged by what he regards as the deceptions practiced in high places—and in high places of his party, at that. We are prepared to believe all of the foregoing, but we are not prepared to believe that Senator Weicker has publicly substantiated what are essentially his insinuations or has done anything for the prospect of getting at the facts fairly and responsibly and in a convincing way. On the contrary, we expect his solo performance has, if anything, undermined the objectives he proclaims. This is serious, dead serious business. We hope Senator Weicker will follow Sam Ervin's lead and treat it that way.