

Mr. Nixon Turns Around

President Nixon's complete about-face on the Watergate affair—from a stance of belligerent resistance to the promise of full White House cooperation with both a Federal grand jury and the select Senate committee—is as welcome as it is belated.

Obviously stung by the mounting waves of criticism and by the dire warnings of some of his strongest supporters that continued intransigence could lead to political disaster, the President has now, in the late President Johnson's phrase, "bitten the bullet." He now states, quite properly, that no executive branch employe should claim immunity from prosecution and that all White House staff members will appear voluntarily before Senator Sam Ervin's committee to testify under oath and provide complete answers to "all proper questions."

These pledges represent a 180-degree turn from the all-pervasive doctrine of Executive privilege that Mr. Nixon had previously embraced and that Attorney General Richard Kleindienst had restated so emphatically before two Senate subcommittees only last week. There have clearly been some sensible second thoughts about the Attorney General's bizarre interpretation that any cooperation in the Watergate investigation by any present or past members of the White House staff would do violence to the constitutional separation of powers.

In his brief press conference yesterday announcing the switch, Mr. Nixon spoke of "major developments" that had come about as the result of a new White House inquiry. Whatever the weight of the various factors involved, the important thing is that the President has moved away from an indefensible position to one of full cooperation. Now the grand jury and Senator Ervin's committee will doubtless proceed without interference to clear up this sordid affair.