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Editorials

'No Immunity' Pledge Revoked

THE WHITE HOUSE ANNOUNCEMENT by press secretary Ron Ziegler that President Nixon is leaving to the Watergate investigating authorities all decisions about granting immunity to present or former members of the Administration is of self-evident importance.

It clarifies and underlines the "absolute and total" freedom and independence of Attorney General-designate Elliot Richardson and of the special prosecutor whom he is to name. They may now proceed to build their case and bring out testimony before the Federal grand jury as they deem best, not as Mr. Nixon might deem best.

The same freedom apparently goes to the Ervin committee of the Senate. Yesterday it was reported that the committee would proceed on the basis of grants of partial, limited immunity to John Dean III and seven other persons linked to the Watergate affair when its public hearings begin May 17.

BY DISENGAGING FROM the decision about who gets immunity for what, the President pointedly absolves himself of any suspicion of intervening to protect friends and favorites, like H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, or of withholding his intervention out of his disfavor for Dean.

In his April 17 announcement of "major developments" in the Watergate case, the President expressed the view that no administration employee, major or minor, past or present, should be given immunity from prosecution. That sounded as though in the interest of getting at the truth, no one was to be spared. But some lawyers saw the possibility that the pledge of no immunity for anyone would get in the way of the prosecutors' using the grant as an incentive to bring out the story of the full extent of wrongdoing. That's why the President's hands-off move looks useful for getting to the bottom of the matter.