

# First Phase of Inquiry

## Senate Hearing Moves at a Leisurely Pace and Postpones Major Questions

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WASHINGTON, May 27—During the first five days of hearings by the Senate Watergate committee, the seven-member panel performed largely as expected: Its tone was reasonably nonpartisan and lawyer-like, its pace was slow and cautious, its immediate purpose was narrow and unusually restrained. There were appearances by such exotic characters as James W. McCord Jr. and John J. Caulfield, both of whom created minor sensations with hearsay or suspicion—or both—about the possibility of President Nixon's involvement in a cover-up of the affair.

News Analysis

But a good many collateral issues brought out in the initial testimony were left for later exploration, and as the Committee dealt in leisurely fashion with its witnesses the really serious investigating seeming a long way off.

### Call For Speed

That has touched off some debate, inside and outside the committee. One member, Senator Herman E. Talmadge, suggested during a closed-door session last week that the panel should speed things up.

The Georgia Democrat said specifically that questions concerning the President's possible involvement had grown so serious and intense that the panel should drop everything else and concentrate on settling them once and for all.

That could be accomplished, as is sometimes done in Congressional hearings, by immediately questioning the men who dealt directly with Mr. Nixon on political matters, such as John N. Mitchell, H. R. Haldeman, and John D. Ehrlichman.

Mr. Mitchell, the former Attorney General, resigned as Mr. Nixon's campaign director last summer, two weeks after the Watergate break-in. Mr. Haldeman, the White House chief of staff, and Mr. Ehrlichman, the President's chief adviser on domestic affairs, resigned April 30.

### 'Not Crazy About Approach'

"So far, I think the committee's done a decent job," a staff member of another Congressional panel remarked, "but I'm not crazy about their approach. I'm used to going for blood right off, and they aren't doing that."

The committee majority—led by the chairman, Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., Democrat of North

Carolina, and his chief counsel, Samuel Dash—shows no sign of abandoning its step-by-step, bottom-to-top approach.

When the hearings resume on June 5, the first witnesses scheduled are Mrs. Sally J. Harmony, a former secretary at Nixon headquarters; Robert Reisner, a former administrative assistant there, and E. Howard Hunt Jr. and G. Gordon Liddy, two of the seven men convicted of breaking into the Democratic National Headquarters at the Watergate complex here.

"The principal objective is to try to bring the American people to the same level of knowledge as those have who have followed it closely," explained Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr., Republican of Connecticut.

### Clues One Through 12

"We may be on clue number 12," Mr. Weicker, the junior member of the committee, remarked, "but they're still on clue number one. I'm pleased with what's been done and especially with the way in which it's been done."

The gradual approach allows the public to pick its own way through the Watergate tangle, and it has the advantage of permitting unhurried thought about important problems that might get lost in a quickened hearing.

But there is also a question about how much the nation can absorb in the early stages and apply effectively later on. Weeks or months may pass before major links in the chain of the conspiracy are connected.

The committee's courtroom style makes the problem more difficult. The leadoff witnesses were intended to describe the Watergate arrests and the political operations of the White House and the Nixon campaign organization.

### Different Approach

But the testimony came from persons with little authority and limited scope. Congressional committees often try to avoid the problem by allowing a well-informed member of their staffs to give a broad background report but the Watergate panel rejected this approach.

So far, it has obtained no direct evidence implicating either the President or any of his chief advisers in either the planning of the break-in or in the efforts to limit investigation of it.

McCord, who installed the wiretaps at the Watergate, testified that Mr. Caulfield, a former White House aide, had said that Mr. Nixon was aware of an effort to keep the convicted conspirators quiet by promising executive clemency.

Mr. Caulfield testified that he did not remember saying that the President knew of the overtures, but he acknowledged that this was his belief and he admitted approaching McCord on the instructions of John W. Dean 3d, former counsel to the President.

### Delay in Replies

The committee will now have to get Mr. Dean before it, and that is expected to take several weeks at least. If Mr. Dean testifies that he acted on orders from a higher official, that official will have to be called.

McCord also alleged that the wiretapping had been approved in advance by Mr. Mitchell, Mr. Mitchell, Mr. Dean and Jeb Stuart Magruder, the deputy director of the Nixon re-election committee.

But McCord's testimony about this separate line of inquiry—prior knowledge—was based on statements that he said were made to him by Liddy, a co-conspirator who was serving as counsel to the finance arm of the Nixon campaign organization.

Liddy has steadfastly declined to make any statement. If he is silent before the committee, it will presumably try to go around him by calling Mr. Dean or Mr. Magruder or both. The two men are subjects of a grand jury inquiry, however, and securing their testimony will be complicated.

### Easiest Phase

The twin threads of prior knowledge and of cover-up are long—the Senate committee can be expected to spend another month or more in dealing with them—but that phase of the inquiry is the easiest.

Still ahead in the inquiry is the clandestine sabotage and espionage that are said to have been carried on by the Nixon campaign organization against various Democratic Presidential contenders.

Also ahead, and also untouched so far by direct testimony, is the vast fund-raising and spending in support of the President's reelection effort.

The committee and the public will presumably also consider a miscellany of questionable activities. Perhaps the outstanding example was evidence that the White House established a secret investigatory arm for thus far unspecified purposes and financed it privately through the President's personal lawyer.

Some on Capitol Hill cling to the hope that it will all be over by next Feb. 28, when the committee's authority runs out. But few doubt that the Senators could get an extension of time if they needed it.