

Wicker Lashes Agnew for Attack on Probe

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Several senators, including a Republican member of the Watergate investigating committee, defended that panel yesterday against criticism by Vice President Spiro T. Agnew.

Agnew, in a speech in St. Louis Monday, accused the committee headed by Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.) of indulging in a "gross perversion of justice" and said the probe "tends to complicate

the search for truth by making both witnesses and committee players on a spotlighted national stage."

One of the sharpest reactions came from Republican Sen. Lowell P. Weicker Jr. of Connecticut, a Watergate committee member.

In the year since the Watergate break-in, he said, "What truth has emerged has come from the press, the courts and the Ervin Committee."

The Connecticut Republi-

can declared in his statement that Agnew's concern that some guilty persons may go free because of the probe "is a concern at odds with the action of his branch of the government."

"Daniel Ellsberg, the White Panthers in Detroit, the Camden 28, and the 11 gambling, narcotics and bribery cases in Miami were all prosecutions that were thrown out because of illegal conduct on the part of the Executive Branch," Weicker added.

Democratic criticism of the Agnew speech came from Majority Leader Mike Mansfield of Montana and his assistant, Sen. Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia.

"I think this is a superb, nonpartisan committee," said Mansfield. Noting that much of the information that led to convictions in the Teapot Dome scandals of the 1920s came from the Senate investigation of that

case, Mansfield said he expects the same thing to happen this time.

Byrd also defended the committee and said "Mechinks, the vice president doth protest too much" when he says the committee's televised hearings may make it impossible to get an impartial jury to try the Watergate cases.

"If Jack Ruby, after shooting Lee Harvey Oswald in full view of screens of millions of television viewers, could get a fair trial by an impartial jury; if Sirhan Sirhan, physically overpowered by Rosie Greer in full view of shocked millions following the shooting of Sen. Robert Kennedy, could get a fair trial before an impartial jury; surely it will not be impossible to select an impartial jury in a far less dramatic and less emotional case involving Watergate offenders," Byrd said.

Senate Republican Leader Hugh Scott, while declining to criticize Agnew's remarks directly, said the Ervin committee is doing "A fair and unbiased, nonpartisan job." Scott said he is not against permitting it to proceed.