

Hugh Scott: Charting His

The rapid deterioration of relations between the White House and the Senate Republican leader, Sen. Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, radically accelerated by the Watergate scandal, hit a new low last Tuesday when Scott spoiled administration efforts to delay passage of a gutted military foreign aid bill.

In the poisonously anti-Nixon, isolationist mood prevailing in the Senate, the bill was cut to shreds. Aid to South Vietnam was severely restricted, reflecting the view of prominent Democratic senators that President Thieu's regime should be abandoned. No help was coming from President Nixon across the continent ("sulking on the beach at San Clemente," in the disillusioned phrase of one supporter).

Given this situation, administration strategists figured the only possible course was to postpone the vote beyond June 30. That would provide a higher level of military aid temporarily and also buy time to improve aid to Vietnam. Accordingly, a meeting was scheduled for 2 p.m. Tuesday in the back room of Scott's minority leader's office just off the Senate floor to be

attended by key pro-administration senators and presidential aides. The subject: how best to achieve the delay.

While administration officials waited in Scott's outer office, 2 p.m. came and went. What they did not know was that Scott was holding his own unscheduled meeting at that moment in the Senate Republican cloakroom, a sacrosanct area barred to non-senators. Scott told pro-administration senators there was no point in delay. Without administration officials around to object, key Nixon backers agreed to go ahead.

The incident buttresses the widespread feeling, both in the Senate and the White House, that Scott is preparing to abandon the Nixon ship in the wreck of Watergate. Scott, a wily old political fox who can scent the trends, is moving toward charting his own course, developing his own legislative strategy and vastly enhancing his own power as White House power declines.

Although the White House depends on loyal senators to manage specific legislation, they cannot interpose a pro-Nixon senator between the White House and Scott as de facto Republican leader.

Early during the Nixon administra-

JUL 1 1973

Own Course

tion, Sen. Robert J. Dole of Kansas played that informal role as Nixon advocate, often in opposition to Scott. No more. Embittered by his humiliating experience as Republican national chairman, Dole tells fellow senators that Mr. Nixon today commands only 19 to 25 sure votes in the 100-member Senate—the principal reason why Scott is charting his own course.

A footnote: Conservative Republican congressmen—especially firebrand first-termers—are plotting to purge Rep. John Anderson of Illinois as GOP caucus chairman because he opposes Mr. Nixon's Indochina policy. Mentioned as successors are Reps. John Rhodes of Arizona, chairman of the House Republican Policy Committee, and Jack Edwards of Alabama. House Republican leaders (including Rhodes), while deploring Anderson's apostasy, are not inclined to support a divisive purge of him.

Although Watergate dominated backroom conversation during last Tuesday's meeting of the Executive Committee of the Republican National Committee, the subject was regarded as so inflammatory that national chair-

man George Bush ordered it kept off the agenda.

Keeping it off the agenda, indeed, was the confidential advice from several members of the Executive Committee—including Clarke Reed, the astute Mississippi state chairman. Reed's perceptive though indirect criticism of President Nixon last month over Watergate got him in trouble with true-blue Nixon loyalists. He feared Tuesday that the Executive Committee could never agree on a Watergate position, resulting in embarrassing publicity.

A footnote: Former White House political aide Harry Dent, now general counsel of the National Committee, strongly urged conservative backing for liberal Rep. William Steiger of Wisconsin, chairman of the party's new committee on reforming party rules and regulations. Steiger has been subjected to continuing hostility from Dent's Southern allies, particularly Reed. So Dent informed the Executive Committee that Steiger "has gone out of his way" to accommodate conservative criticism of his reform operations.