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Scowls Now Smiles, Hisses Now Silence

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WASHINGTON, July 26 — It wasn't exactly a love feast, but John D. Ehrlichman and the Senate Watergate committee seemed today to have decided to at least stop kicking sand in one another's faces.

During his first two days on the witness stand, the hostility between the former domestic affairs adviser to the President and the committee members all but crackled through the crowded caucus room on the third floor of the Old Senate Office Building.

If he was frequently glowering and waspishly aggressive in his answers, they were often snipish and transparently skeptical in their questions.

Today things were somewhat different.

The husky, baldish Mr. Ehrlichman smiled a lot through his 5 o'clock shadow. And while he was no Uriah Heep, his quotient of deference had risen noticeably.

For the most part, the committee members replied in kind, apparently sealing the "truce with honor."

A Patriarch's Prerogative

Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., the courtly, white-haired chairman, may have smoothed the way for the detente.

Recognizing that Mr. Ehrlichman seemed to feel like a White House rider (albeit unhorsed) treating with the enemy camp on the hill, the 76-year-old Mr. Ervin exercised a patriarch's prerogative by silencing his most vocal followers.

Seating himself at the committee table under the television lights at 10:12 A.M. after arriving to the applause of the standing-room crowd in the caucus room, the North Carolina Democrat sternly repeated his warning of yesterday.

"We are trying to conduct a dignified hearing which will be as fair as possible to everybody concerned," he drawled, "and the committee is going to have to give serious consideration to the question of excluding from the hearing room persons who audibly express their approval or disapproval of any person or any question or any answer in an audible

manner, and I hope that I will not have to repeat this request again."

The crowds this week have really been on Mr. Ehrlichman, hissing and groaning at parts of his testimony, laughing at barbs from the interrogators.

Not only Mr. Ehrlichman but also his former White House associates, one said, have been annoyed at the "cliques" in the committee room.

But Senator Ervin put a stop to the noise today. He is the indisputable hero of most of those who wait on long lines for the privilege of climbing the winding, marble stairs to stand on the klieg-lighted edge of history in the making.

And what Senator Ervin wants, Senator Ervin gets — at least from his admirers in that room. So when he came back from lunch later, the recent ritual of sustained applause was broken. A scattering of handclaps was quickly shushed. When he returned once more from a break to vote, not a sound was heard.

On his part, Mr. Ehrlichman had at least one other good reason for softening the grim visage he has presented to the committee, the spectators and the television audience.

His wife, Jeanne, had scolded him for scowling.

A Broad Smile

As Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr., the Connecticut Republican who has been a persistent critic of the White House handling of the Watergate affair, questioned him this morning about the 1971 break-in at the office of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, Mr. Ehrlichman interjected with a broad smile:

"Incidentally, my wife chided me a little bit last night because I appear to scowl at you when you answer your questions. The fact is you have over your head two of the greatest lights I have encountered and I am afraid that has to account for the way I look in your direction. I am sorry."

At that, the crowd laughed — in friendly fashion. And Senator Ervin, benignly withholding his gavel, forgave them.



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John D. Ehrlichman going over his papers in a room across the rotunda of the Old Senate Office Building from the Caucus Room. He arrived a half hour early.