

White House Sought Probe of Ellsberg

By Jack Anderson

To drum up prejudice against Daniel Ellsberg while the government was preparing its case against him in 1971, the White House secretly asked a congressional committee to hold hearings on his theft of the Pentagon Papers.

The appeal for Ellsberg hearings was made by White House officials to the House Internal Security Committee through the office of its cagey chairman, Rep. Richard Ichord (D-Mo.), in June, 1971.

Ichord's aide, William Hecht, confirmed to us that a White House official called him and confided: "Some committee is going to investigate this matter. It should be one with genuine interest in the national security."

When several more pressing calls followed, Hecht began to wonder just who at the White House was so eager for the hearings.

"Is this something the President wants done?" Hecht inquired.

"Yes," was the immediate White House response.

Ichord cautioned his aide that with criminal charges pending against Ellsberg, he would not risk prejudicing the case with pre-trial publicity unless national security arguments were overwhelming.

"The only way I'd go ahead with this is if the President personally asked me," he instructed Hecht. Dutifully, the

staffer informed the White House. Sure enough, within days a call came to Ichord from his acquaintance in the Oval Office, Richard Nixon.

Footnote: Today, the shoe is tightly on the other foot. Ex-Nixon aides face prosecution in the Watergate debacle and are now loudly complaining that their own cases are being prejudiced by congressional hearings.

Safety Sabotaged — As chairman of a House committee on the infirming Re-