

'Solution' at Hand

The counter-offensive launched by the White House to break the Watergate siege and shore up President Nixon's dwindling public support is clearly aimed at minimizing the outstanding issues and suggesting that they are about to be resolved.

The President offers to give to Chief District Judge John J. Sirica a number of documents, notes and dictation belts which he believes to be pertinent to establishing his credibility. Judge Sirica has properly rejected such a trade.

The President meets with Republican Senators and Representatives and persuades the majority of them that before long he will tell everything, clear the air and put Watergate behind him.

Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., who replaced H. R. Halde- man as Presidential chief of staff, volunteers the information that "the President is moving toward a solution that will satisfy the need of the Senate Watergate committee."

All these optimistic forecasts have the earmarks of an effort to dilute and distort the focus of the real issue—a sprawling corruption and unprecedented usurpation and misuse of Governmental power that far transcend the Watergate conspiracy.

Even as the White House once more resorts to its practice of "stroking" angry and dispirited Republican Congressional delegations, evidence of political corruption sanctioned by persons close to the Administration, is again spread full view before the American people.

Spokesmen for five giant corporations have set forth in bizarre detail the devious devices they used to funnel illegal campaign contributions into the Nixon coffers.

Employees of the American Ship Building Company tell Senate investigators of carefully planned schemes to use bogus bonuses to executives as a cover for illegal payments to the Committee for the Re-Election of the

President. The committee itself stands accused of having created front organizations as conduits for such illegal contributions.

These were not aberrations of zealous underlings, as Mr. Nixon has repeatedly tried to make the American people believe. Orin E. Atkins, chairman of Ashland Oil's board, has testified that Maurice J. Stans, former Secretary of Commerce and chairman of the re-election finance committee, called company executives to ask for a "reconstruction," i.e., falsification, of company records to hide the illegal gifts. Mr. Atkins was hardly exaggerating when he characterized this form of fund raising as "extortion."

These were neither isolated cases nor politics-as-usual. Evidence is piling up of the kind of *quid pro quo* that followed such transactions, as in the higher prices for milk in the wake of the milk producers' \$2 million in campaign donations. The real price of such extortion is, in the end, paid by the American people. The President's disclaimers have done nothing to answer the charges against his Administration, to explain away the facts of the price rises, or to absolve him of ultimate responsibility for actions of his subordinates.

The issue of the tapes remains an important count in the case against Mr. Nixon. It is still crucial to the determination of the innocence or guilt, not only of the President but of all those of his associates and subordinates who were caught in the web of corruption, law-breaking and usurpation of power.

But the White House is sadly misguided if it believes it can pick out and offer "solutions" for a few ingredients of the Watergate witches' brew and let the rest ooze out of the public consciousness. General Haig may hold out hope that the solution is at hand. The American people have come to realize, however late, that the Nixon Administration has grievously subverted governmental ethics, thereby jeopardizing fundamental principles beyond repair by way of political stroking, facelifting and compromise. The need is for full exposure of the rot and a new start.