

Doubts on Vesco Try to Fix Probe

New York

A key government witness in the criminal trial of former Attorney General John N. Mitchell and former Commerce Secretary Maurice Stans testified yesterday that he does not believe there was an attempt to "fix" a federal investigation of financier Robert L. Vesco.

Laurence B. Richardson, a former top Vesco associate and alleged co-conspirator in the case against the two former Nixon cabinet officers, said he believes the financier wanted only a fair hearing before the Securities and Exchange Commission that was investigating his affairs.

Under intense cross-

examination by defense attorneys Peter Fleming Jr., for Mitchell, and Walter Bonner, for Stans, the witness referred to a meeting on March 8, 1972, during which Vesco pledged to Stans a half-million dollar donation to the President's 1972 re-election campaign.

He said that during an airplane flight from Vesco's headquarters in New Jersey to Washington for talks about the donation there was no discussion between him and Vesco about a fix.

"I believe it was Vesco's intention to go down there and talk about a large contribution," he said.

During the meeting, he

said, Vesco told Stans "he had a problem."

At the meeting, he said Vesco offered to contribute \$250,000 before June 7, 1972 — the date when a new election law requiring full disclosure of campaign contributions was to become effective.

He pledged another \$250,000 after the election, he said.

There was no reference during the meeting to the contributions hinging on a favorable outcome of the SEC investigation, he said.

"Had you agreed to fix the ICC (Interstate Commerce Commission) case with the SEC?" Richardson was asked.

"No," he replied.

"Did you ever talk to Vesco about fixing the case?"

"There was no conversation about that at any time."

Richardson also testified that Vesco sent a threat to Mitchell a month before the 1972 presidential election to get an SEC subpoena quashed or he would "blow the lid off the whole thing."

"Get ahold of Mitchell and those guys and tell them to get it quashed or I'll blow the lid off the whole thing," Vesco was quoted by Richardson as saying.

Richardson said Vesco was speaking to Harry L. Sears, then one of his employees.

Testimony has not indicated whether Sears actually passed the threat along to Mitchell.