

Hill, Prosecutors Begin

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Between March 27, 1973, and April 14, 1973 the period covered in the transcripts of Presidential conversations in today's Washington Post, the Watergate story achieved new dimensions.

Persons deeply associated with the cover-up, especially John W. Dean III, Jeb. S. Magruder and James W. McCord, were beginning to describe to prosecutors and Senate investigators the depths of the scandal.

Their revelations became banner headlines in virtually all the nation's press, and the television networks began focusing on Watergate to a degree far beyond past efforts. Watergate was never again to be simply a "Washington story."

On Capitol Hill, members of the Senate Watergate committee, especially Lowell P. Weicker Jr. (R-Conn.), began to seize the initiative against the White House.

On March 27, 1973, the committee announced that its hearings, which were to begin in May, would be televised live. The same day, Weicker, who

had been conducting his own Watergate investigation, announced that he had established that White House aides were involved in the bugging of Democratic headquarters.

"Now Weicker is out today with another statement," White House chief of staff H. R. Haldeman told Mr. Nixon and adviser for domestic affairs John D. Ehrlichman in the first conversation printed in The Post today. "He has absolute proof that it goes to the White House staff and he is not going to name names until he gets his evidence in hand."

"Well, who is Weicker," the President demanded. "Who does he think he is talking about?"

Later, after conjecture as to whether former White House special counsel Charles W. Colson or other aides might have been talking to Weicker, Mr. Nixon asked, "What the hell makes Weicker tick?"

"Nobody's been able to figure that out," Ehrlichman responded.

Appearing on the television show "Meet the Press" the following Sunday, April 1, Weicker followed up with

a demand that Haldeman resign because of the scandal.

There were other pressures from Capitol Hill. On March 27, Senate Republican leaders publicly asked that Mr. Nixon allow Dean, who was more and more at the focus of Watergate allegations to testify before the Senate. On March 29, two Republican Senators, Charles McC. Mathias of Maryland and Bob Packwood of Oregon, demanded once again that a special prosecutor be appointed to investigate the scandal.

The original Watergate prosecutors were now going after the White House. Stung by criticism from Watergate Judge John J. Sirica, principal Assistant U.S. Attorney Earl J. Silbert and his two assistants, Seymour Glanzer and Donald Campbell, reconvened the Watergate grand jury on March 26 and started interrogating the defendants who had been given lengthy provisional sentences by Sirica three days earlier.

"Dean is not getting the information from Silbert on those things said at the grand jury," Haldeman told Mr. Nixon on March 27. "And (former Attorney General John) Mitchell finds

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that absolutely incompetent and says it is Kleindienst's responsibility. He is supposed to be sending us—"

"Ask Kleindienst, John," Mr. Nixon interrupted. "Put it on the basis that you're not asking nor in effect is the White House asking; that John Mitchell says you've got to have this information from the grand jury at this time and you owe it to him."

In a later conversation, not printed today, Mr. Nixon and Kleindienst make references to grand jury reports that Kleindienst had supplied the President, apparently as a result of urgings after the March 27 discussion.

References to Kleindienst indicate frequently that Mr. Nixon and his aides didn't know whether to fire Kleindienst or attempt to make maximum use of him.

The transcript, which refers to Mr. Nixon as "P" and other participants in the conversations by the initial of their last name, shows this dialogue on March 27:

E. Well, I am going to see him today, and Bob's going to talk to him, and we will hit him from two directions.

P. Get Kleindienst to resign?

E. Oh, no, no. Get him out front.

P. Oh, I thought you said get him out of the office.

E. Oh, no. I hadn't talked about that. That's Bill Rogers (Secretary of State at the time).

P. Oh, I am sorry John.

A moment later, the President said, "I am afraid its (unintelligible) of cancelling him right away. Let's see. Let's see about that. Maybe we can."

By March 28, defendant E. Howard Hunt Jr. began testifying before the Watergate grand jury although he had gotten \$75,000 the White House from only a week earlier. At first, prosecutors have said, Hunt continued to lie, as he had all along. But soon, confronted with the threat of not having his 35-year sentence reduced and of having more added on, Hunt began to talk. It was his testimony that revealed that the White House plumbers had broken into the office of Dr. Lewis Fielding, Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, in hopes of finding information damaging to Ellsberg.

Even worse, the Nixon inner circle

was about to have a defector. On March 30, 1973, John Dean, the President's young counsel, hired Charles N. Shaffer as his own counsel. Shaffer and attorney Robert C. McCandless, Dean's brother-in-law through his first marriage, soon went to Silbert to give the news that Dean wanted to talk.

During those weeks, a telephone conversation between Mr. Nixon and Ehrlichman on April 8, 1973, indicates the White House was kept in the dark as to what Dean was saying.

The conversation of that day begins with Ehrlichman telling the President, "I just wanted to post you on the Dean meeting," and Ehrlichman mentioning that Dean will begin appearing before the grand jury as well as the prosecutors.

"Dean says it (Watergate) isn't going to go away," Ehrlichman told Mr. Nixon. "It's right on top of us and that the smartest thing that he, Dean, could do is go down there and appear cooperative."

"Right," said Mr. Nixon.

"So he'll be around all day tomorrow and we'll see how this unfolds during the day," Ehrlichman said.