

Probers Hear Petersen

Washington

Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen told the House Judiciary Committee yesterday he never received any information indicating the President was involved in the Watergate coverup.

During a closed session of the committee's impeachment inquiry, Petersen was asked by Representative Charles Sandman (Rep-N.J.), "Have you ever had any information that the President was wrongfully involved?"

Sandman later told newsmen, "Petersen said he had no information or evidence the President was wrongfully involved."

Representative Don Edwards (Dem-Calif.), confirmed Sandman's version of the exchange and said, "Petersen is testifying point-blank that the President didn't know about the cover-up."

However, Representative Hamilton Fish Jr. (Rep-N.Y.), noted that Petersen has not been "on top of the case" for more than one year.

"He doesn't know what we know," said Fish, who noted Petersen had told the committee he had not read all of the edited White House transcripts and was unfamiliar with other developments in the case. Petersen, head of the criminal division in the Justice Department, supervised the initial investigation of the Watergate break-in.

He told the committee of a series of conversations he had with President Nixon in April, 1973, during which he briefed Mr. Nixon about the progress of the Watergate investigation.

Petersen said he gave the President information about developments in the secret sessions of the Watergate grand jury but had been unaware that the President subsequently relayed what he said to aides.

Fish said Petersen contended it was proper to tell the President what was happening before the grand jury.

"The problem is to what use it is put," Fish quoted Petersen as telling the committee. Then the New York Republican added: "Then

Petersen passed the buck back to us and said that's for you gentlemen to decide."

After the morning session, Representative John Seiberling (Rep-Ohio), characterized Petersen's testimony as "dynamite," but did not elaborate.

James D. St. Clair, President Nixon's defense lawyer, described Petersen's testimony as "very favorable" to the President.

"I think it's interesting; I don't think it's dynamite," said Representative Lawrence Hogan (Rep-Md.).

Questioning of Petersen focused on 22 conversations

he had with the President, in person and on the telephone, between April 15 and April 28, 1973.

During those discussions, Petersen informed the President of the progress of the Watergate coverup investigation and particularly of growing evidence of the involvement of some of his closest aides.

In one conversation, Petersen advised Mr. Nixon to fire H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, the two top White House aides, but to retain White House counsel John W. Dean III, because he was cooperating with investigators.

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