

What Ford May Have Feared



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SPECIAL Watergate Prosecutor Leon Jaworski would have sought an indictment against former President Nixon "in a matter of weeks," according to sources familiar with the plans, if President Ford hadn't intervened with a pardon.

These sources say the special prosecutor intended to indict Mr. Nixon solely for obstruction of justice. Jaworski believed he had "an iron-clad case" against the former President and would get an "almost certain conviction," our sources report.

The case would have been based heavily upon Mr. Nixon's own tapes, which provide prima-facie evidence that he participated in the Watergate cover-up. Jaworski's deputy, James Neal, had already arranged for Secret Service technicians to testify about the taping system.

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OUR SOURCES describe Jaworski as a man with a deep faith in the judicial processes. They say he simply could not ignore the verdict of the House Judiciary Committee, which voted unanimously to impeach Mr. Nixon for obstruction of justice, nor the will of the Watergate grand jury, which voted 19 to 0 to name him as an unindicted co-conspirator.

The grand jury would have indicted him last March if Jaworski had not counseled that a sitting President couldn't be legally indicted.

The threat of indictment hung over the former President like Damocles' sword. Sources who have had access to him in his

seclusion at San Clemente describe him as "totally weary, terribly depressed and completely despondent."

One source has been struck by the "stark loneliness" of Richard Nixon. He is "absolutely alone within himself," the source explains.

All sources agree that he has complete control of his faculties, although his conversation sometimes wanders and his nerves seem frayed.

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MR. NIXON'S psyche is so "delicate," our sources report, that his loyal aide Ronald Ziegler and attorney Herbert "Jack" Miller took President Ford's representative, attorney Benton Becker, aside before putting him together with Mr. Nixon at San Clemente. They asked the judicious Becker to keep the meeting informal.

Becker refused to comment on the meeting, except to say he found Mr. Nixon "alert" and "cordial."

The main cause of Mr. Nixon's anguish, according to our sources, was the expectation that Jaworski would ask the grand jury to indict him. The distraught Mr. Nixon even developed a strange inability to repeat Jaworski's name.

We have established that President Ford learned of Mr. Nixon's mental state and imminent indictment. White House sources say the President feared the indictment could cause his predecessor a nervous breakdown.