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Hisses, Snickers, Laughter

Hearing Spectators Warned

Spectators at the Senate Watergate hearings were strongly admonished yesterday by three senators for their increasingly vocal and partisan reaction to the questioning of witnesses.

The testimony this week of John D. Ehrlichman, former domestic affairs adviser to the President, at times has drawn hisses, snickers and open laughter from the audience. At the same time, the spectators have cheered and applauded the questions of committee chairman Sam J. Ervin Jr. They had even been loudly applauding Sen. Ervin's entrances into the Senate Caucus Room.

When the audience laughed at one of Ehrlichman's responses yesterday, Sen. Ervin broke in to ask the spectators to "refrain from expressing its disapproval of anything which occurs in connection with the interrogation of the witness."

Sen. Herman Talmadge (D-Ga.), who was questioning Ehrlichman at the time, said that he shared Ervin's view. "We are not conducting a show or entertainment program here," Talmadge said. "What I am trying to do is find out what the authority of the President of the United States is..."

Sen. Howard Baker (R-Tenn.), minority chairman of the committee, told the audience, "This committee has a tough job... but believe me it makes it infinitely tougher if we are cast in the role of conducting a circus or entertainment. It does not help the witness, it does not help this committee and it constantly detracts from the objectivity and the even-handedness with which we tried to conduct this undertaking..."

The committee's conduct of the hearings has been characterized as a "witch hunt" and a circus by some Nixon administration officials.