

Watergate Case

Nixon Says He'll Help the Probers

President Reacts to Criticism

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Responding to growing criticism, the White House yesterday indicated its readiness to compromise with the Senate's investigation of the Watergate case on the issue of furnishing witnesses and information from President Nixon's personal staff.

White House press secretary Ronald Ziegler announced at the same time that the President has issued an order to all members of his staff to testify if called before a federal grand jury that is continuing to look into the Watergate raid.

With respect to both the court and Congressional inquiries into political espionage, Ziegler said the President is willing to cooperate in any way that does not do "violence to the separation of powers." In either investigation, however, appearances by members of the White House staff would be limited to sessions closed to the public.

H. R. Haldeman, the President's chief of staff, and John W. Dean III, the White House counsel, have both been connected by hearsay to the advance planning of

the Watergate raid. Neither is believed to have appeared before the grand jury investigating the case.

TESTIMONY

But last summer and fall the grand jury called, and heard from, other senior advisers to the President.

Mr. Nixon has invoked the doctrine of executive privi-

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lege to prevent his staff from testifying before the Senate's Watergate investigation, but he has never applied the doctrine to judicial proceedings. The President himself is legally immune from being required to appear in a judicial proceeding, but whether his aides could be required to appear is legally unclear.

Ziegler presented his statements yesterday as reaffirmation of old policy to clear up certain "misunderstandings" about the White House position.

But for the first time the White House appeared to be showing concern about the bipartisan attacks on the administration's conduct in the case. Also for the first time, Ziegler's remarks, made after lengthy White House meetings, had a conciliatory tone.

CONCERN

The change was believed to be due in part to the concern expressed by a number of Republicans in Congress and elsewhere that the White House might be covering up involvement of aides and others close to the President with men employed by the Committee for the Re-election of the President who were convicted of the breaking into and bugging the headquarters of the

Democratic National Committee last year.

Ziegler said he was speaking out because of concern over a "series of unsubstantial charges" that have been emerging from the special Senate committee headed by Sam J. Ervin (Dem-N.C.) implicating White House staff members in the case.

He denied that staff members were involved and said that "the Personal rights of individual members have been abused by procedures that are less than orderly and judicial."

James W. McCord Jr., one of those convicted, has testified under oath before the Ervin committee that his fellow conspirators in the case gave him the impression that they had cleared their clandestine operations with ranking officials in the administration, according to several sources.

Ziegler insisted that the White House position has always been one of cooperation concerning the Watergate matter. The President has said that in order to preserve the separation of powers he would not let Dean or other staff members appear before a formal meeting of Congressional committees, and Ziegler said yesterday that policy is unchanged.

As for the Ervin committee, Ziegler would not specify what procedure might be acceptable to the President, but he clearly indicated a willingness to make some compromise between the committee's desire to have Dean and other officials appear as sworn witnesses before an open session and the White House's offer, made to the Senate Judiciary Committee, to accept written questions and supply written answers.