

congress

The Watergate Standoff

FOR many Americans the Watergate affair might be low-grade political hijinx of doubtful entertainment value; but by last week there were many Republicans of stature — as well as Democrats — who were taking a more serious view of the matter.

Minority leader Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania expressed the Republican anguish clearly. Although the "general public seems to be dismissing the matter as a quarrel between political parties, those of us whose profession is politics are deeply disturbed at any developments which taint the political process."

Most persistent in demanding that the whole Watergate bugging operation, plus other alleged political espionage, be made public was Republican Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr. of Connecticut, a member of the seven-man committee set up to investigate Watergate and similar election irregularities.

'Lost Faith'

Weicker declared, "I am a professional politician. Because of things like the Watergate, people have lost faith in politicians, and I want to see that changed. The only thing that will convince them to respect politicians is to bring dirty business like the Watergate out in the open."

But bringing Watergate out in the open was proving both difficult and confusing. While Weicker, Scott and even Republican National Chairman George Bush called for White House aides to testify before both a Federal Grand Jury investigating criminal aspects of Watergate and the committee

headed by Senator Sam Ervin (Dem.-N.C.), President Nixon took a different view.

The Administration would be glad to cooperate, said White House Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler, by permitting White House aides to testify before a Grand Jury and even Ervin's committee — but only informally and behind closed doors.

McCord's Testimony

Even as the offer was made, testimony by one of the key figures in the mess, convicted burglar James McCord, who had been security coordinator for the Committee to Re-elect the President, was spilling out of the Ervin committee's se-

'Divine right went out with the Revolution'

cret session (The New York Times reported most of the leaks seemed to come from McCord himself).

Ziegler early last week, from the San Clemente White House, bitterly described them as "irresponsible leaks in tidal wave proportions . . . I would encourage the chairman (Senator Ervin) to get his own disorganized house in order so that the investigation can go forward in a proper atmosphere of traditional fairness and due process."

The leaks that had so aroused the ire of Ziegler (and hence presumably that of his boss, President Nixon), included "hearsay" testimony by McCord that:

Former Attorney General John N. Mitchell; Jeb Stuart Magruder, deputy manager of the Nixon campaign;

Charles W. Colson, former White House counsel; John W. Dean 3rd, the President's present lawyer; H.R. Halde- man, the present chief-of-staff in the White House — and other Presidential aides and intimates — had been directly aware of or participated in decisions connected with Watergate.

From Liddy

Actually, the McCord testimony apparently was entirely information allegedly told him by G. Gordon Liddy, also convicted in the Watergate affair and now facing 20 years for burglary.

Liddy himself, credited with being the mastermind of the Watergate fiasco, refused to talk. Even when threatened with additional prison years for contempt of court (and at midweek he was given 18 months more because he would not give evidence before the Grand Jury) Liddy kept mum.

Meanwhile, the issue of "executive privilege," a device thus far employed by President Nixon to keep his White House aides from formally testifying before Ervin's committee, got hotter.

Senator Ervin declared he would not accept the President's compromise on testimony by White House aides: They must testify under oath and publicly, he said.

"Divine right went out with the American Revolution and doesn't belong to White House aides," said Ervin. The President was "shooting the so-called executive privilege doctrine way out past the stratosphere . . . and a terrible disservice to the high office of the Presidency. That is not executive privilege, that is executive poppycock."