

Clash in Panel Called Tip Of an Iceberg of Politics

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WASHINGTON, June 13 — The political infighting that exploded in public today at the Senate Watergate hearings had been simmering below the surface for months.

It was inevitable, according to Senators and Watergate committee staff members, that the frustrations of some of the committee's members would eventually be bared in public.

They said that it was likely that open political clashes, like the one today between Senators Edward J. Gurney and Sam J. Ervin Jr., would become frequent features of the committee's hearings in weeks to come.

After all, one Senator noted in a recent interview, the committee's members are concerned not only about their own ambitions but also about those of their parties.

Senator Gurney, a Florida Republican, is said to have been quietly seething for some time over what he believes to be the slow pace of the hearings, the lack of cooperation from the committee's Democrats and the failure of the committee to provide him with an adequate staff.

Administration Supporter

Since he entered the Senate in 1969, Mr. Gurney has been a solid supporter of the programs and policies of the Nixon Administration. Last year, during the Judiciary Committee's investigation of the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation Senator Gurney acted as the chief defender of the White House.

Some of his colleagues expected him to play a similar role on the Watergate committee. They have, they say, been surprised that the Florida Republican has proved to be a rather aggressive questioner.

Nonetheless, Senator Gurney squirmed visibly this afternoon as Senator Ervin, the committee's chairman, asked a series of sharp questions of Maurice H. Stans, the finance director of the Nixon re-election committee.

It was inconceivable, Senator Ervin remarked time and again, that a meticulous accountant like Mr. Stans would allow records of Republican contributors to be destroyed and would allow nearly \$2-billion in cash to be spent without any idea of what it was being used for.

Openly Hostile

Senator Ervin's questions were openly hostile, and Senator Gurney felt constrained to object — the old position of Administration defender coming to the surface again, according to a committee Democrat.

"I for one," Senator Gurney declared, just as the committee was about to take a break for a vote on the Senate floor, "have not appreciated the harassment of this witness by the chairman in the questioning that has just finished."

Senator Ervin, affecting the folksy manner that is his style in political debates, replied, "I am an old country lawyer and I don't know the finer ways to do it. I just have to do it my way."

The political squabbles began before the committee was

even created. Republicans wanted an equal number of Democrats and Republicans on the committee; they wanted the committee to investigate the 1964 and 1968 elections, as well as the one in 1972, and they wanted a sizable allotment of the committee's staff to go to the Republicans.

Partial Concession

Otherwise, the Republicans said, the committee's investigation would develop into partisan witch-hunt.

But the Democratic majority in the Senate rejected the Republicans' assertions, making only the partial concession of giving the Republicans one-third of the committee's staff allotment.

Since the committee began functioning, the Democrats have remained solidly behind Senator Ervin, a North Carolina Democrat. The Democrats were selected for the committee because they have no national ambitions, and Senators Herman E. Talmadge of Georgia, Daniel K. Inouye of Hawaii and Joseph M. Montoya of New Mexico have been content to play a supporting role to Senator Ervin and his chief counsel, Samuel Dash.

Among the Republicans, however, there has been a surprising amount of hostility.

Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee, the ranking Republican, is said by some other Senators to be using the committee as a forum to further his Presidential ambitions. The glowing press reports of Mr. Baker's work on the committee are said to be a source of jealousy among other Republicans both on and off the committee.

Weicker Aloof

Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr. of Connecticut has remained aloof from the other Republicans on the committee.

Mr. Weicker has been conducting an investigation of his own, holding interviews in private with some of the principals in the Watergate case.

When a report of Mr. Weicker's interview with John W. Dean 3d, the former White House counsel, was disclosed in The New York Times last weekend, Mr. Weicker said that he was sure the document had been leaked by another committee member who wanted to sabotage the investigation Mr. Weicker was operating.

In early April, Senator Weicker issued a statement declaring that H. R. Haldeman, then the White House chief of staff, should accept all responsibility for improper Republican political activity and should resign.

The next day, without telling Mr. Weicker in advance, Senators Ervin and Baker issued a joint statement declaring that the committee had no evidence of illegal actions by Mr. Haldeman. It was the kind of statement that was outside the normal bounds of Senatorial courtesy, according to some staff members.

Senator Gurney, who is up for re-election in 1974, is said to believe that other Senators and staff members are trying to block him from participating in critical committee work by not keeping him informed of the case as it develops.