

Leaks Stir Storm on Hill

By Spencer Rich

Washington Post Staff Writer

An atmosphere of poisonous intrigue and backbiting has begun to envelop the Senate's Watergate investigation, fueled by leaks and counterleaks of supposedly top secret information gathered by committee investigators.

"This is not just a bit of a leak. This is a hemorrhage," said one astounded member of the committee after learning that the press had obtained copies of a seven-

page secret summary of a closed committee hearing with former White House Counsel John W. Dean III last Saturday.

This week, at least, the flurry of leaks has centered on Dean, expected to be the committee's star witness, whose public testimony was put off a week in order to avoid possible embarrassment to the President while the summit meeting with Soviet party leader Leonid I. Brezhnev is still on.

In the past few days, the following secret information

has been leaked to the press on Dean:

- How Dean borrowed \$4,850 in GOP campaign funds to finance his honeymoon.

- The substance of Dean's testimony at last Saturday's secret meeting with the committee staff, which corroborated the \$4,850 story, implicated President Nixon and former White House aides H.R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman in the Watergate cover-up, and

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hinted that the White House hoped that Sen. Howard H. Baker (R-Tenn.) would be its patsy on the Senate select Watergate committee.

- A White House summary, provided to the committee, of meetings between Dean and the President between April 13, 1972, and April 22, 1973; and a separate summary of the same meetings developed by the committee.

Some of these leaks came from members of the Watergate committee, others from committee staff, possibly without the knowledge of their employers. Still others

appear to have originated with attorneys for some of the dozens of persons implicated in various ways in the Watergate scandal, and still others from "federal investigators"—which means employees of the Justice Department or other agencies with access to information on Dean and the Watergate affair.

Yesterday, both Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) and Minority Leader Hugh Scott (R-Pa.) deplored the situation. "It is my understanding that these meetings were to be held in secrecy," Mansfield said with annoyance.

Scott said, "It looks like a great many people are waging their separate campaigns through the organization and manipulation of leaks. It appears that they come from both sides of the controversy."

Interviews with members of the committee and their staff, and with executive branch figures, indicate Scott's surmise is correct.

The battle—this week, at any rate—is over the credi-

bility and reputation of John Dean. Dean is conceded to be one of the most knowledgeable witnesses that the committee will have. He was right at the heart of the White House during virtually the entire period of the alleged cover-up. He is in a position to deeply damage the President.

Dean has already indicated he intends to do so to avoid being made what he calls the fall guy for the Watergate scandal.

It is very much in the interest of the White House to impeach Dean's character and thereby diminish the impact of his forthcoming public testimony.

On the other hand, there are those in the committee and possibly around Dean himself who are seeking to counteract the attack. Some are seeking to give the impression that committee Republicans are in cahoots with the White House. Viewed from this angle, the recent flurry of leaks on

Dean becomes stroke and counterstroke in a battle over Dean's reputation and public believability.

Let's go back to Saturday: Dean is questioned in closed session by a Senate Watergate committee group headed by Baker, the senior Republican on the committee. Fred Thompson, Baker's minority counsel, pops up with a question very damaging to Dean: "Did you use \$4,850 of campaign funds for your own honeymoon?"

This question, implying dishonesty or a less-than-ethical use of campaign funds even though they were repaid, is a legitimate area of inquiry and Dean responds in the affirmative. Dean then continues his testimony and makes a series

of statements on the Watergate scandal very damaging to the President.

Two days later, columnist Jack Anderson and The New York Times appear with stories relating solely to the \$4,850 loan but not the rest of the testimony—stories extremely damaging to Dean's credibility. Scott, in the Senate the next day, implies that Dean is an "embezzler" and a "liar." The leak of the story clearly is a victory for those seeking to damage Dean's image.

Thompson said yesterday through a spokesman that the idea to ask the \$4,850 question came to him as a result of information "from more than one source, including attorneys and others

involved in the investigation, and in addition, the Justice Department was already aware."

Fair enough, but who then leaked the damaging portion alone to Anderson and The Times?

According to one Senate aide involved with the Watergate committee, several reporters called him and said Charles A. Wright, a Texas University law professor who is consulting with White House Counsel Leonard Garment on Watergate legal matters, had tipped them off about the \$4,850 loan. Reached by phone yesterday, Wright said, "absolutely not true. I first knew about it when I saw Jack Anderson's show."

Both Baker and Thompson also made absolute denials of having planted the story. Former White House aide Charles Colson also was named by a few reporters—second hand—but couldn't be reached for comment. Another reporter said he got the tip from the Justice Department. It appears

likely, however, that the tip actually came from a minority staff member of the Watergate committee—but not Thompson.

It isn't clear whether the staff member leaked the material to damage Dean, or simply gave the story to a reporter, as a personal favor.

Whatever the explanation of the first step, the second step is absolutely certain. One of the senators on the committee, who deeply fears a White House cover-up, quickly leaked as a countermove the first two pages of a seven-page summary of all of Dean's Saturday testimony. The leak was designed to revive sensational charges against the White House and drive the story of Dean's \$4,850 loan off the front pages and to reveal fully for the first time that the White House had attempted to "reach" Sen. Baker and apparently persuade him to appoint as

GOP counsel a man who would be "safe" for the White House. (Baker flatly and absolutely denied that he had responded to White House advice on choice of a counsel, saying he had already chosen Thompson, a prosecuting attorney in Tennessee.)

This two-page leak had its desired press effect; and the senator quickly followed up by releasing the remaining five summary pages of Dean's testimony with additional damaging stories about Mr. Nixon.

There then followed what might be labeled a countermove of their own by the Anti-Dean Forces: the leakage of the White House "log" of conversations between the President and Dean over the one-year-period ended this past April. The burden of this was to try to show that in reality Dean had failed to inform the President of Watergate.

There the matter rests, more or less. But the past week's events show that increasingly in recent weeks, major participants in the Watergate scandal and investigation have been using the media to argue out their case by covert supply of material. It is a battle for public opinion.

"It's terrible, terrible about these leaks," one senator said angrily to a reporter seeking a document. Then he sighed and added, "I really shouldn't do this" and handed over a Xerox copy of the document.