

Reaction to Hearings

Mood in White House

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President Nixon and his top aides believe that the Senate Watergate hearings are unfair and constitute a "political witch-hunt," according to White House sources.

Despite apparent bipartisan and public support for the hearings and the manner in which they are being conducted, the sources said that the President in the last

weeks has expressed bitterness and deep hostility toward the two-month-old proceedings.

"The President," one source said, "sees the hearings as an attempt to get Richard Nixon and do it just damn unfairly." According to four separate sources, the hostility toward the hearings is pervasive among the White House staff, especially by former assistants to H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, the deposed former top presidential aides.

One White House source said he saw the struggle

with the Senate Watergate committee as not just politics, but a battle of survival. "The Ervin committee is out to destroy the President," he said.

ACCENT

The bitterness, according to the sources, extends to the point where some White House aides openly mock the members of the Senate committee. In a reference to Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr. (Dem-N.C.), the committee chairman, one White House aide put on a Southern accent and told a reporter:

"I just little ole country bumpkin Sam and this nasty politics offends my pea-picking heart."

The aide, who holds a middle level position in the

White House, then dropped the Southern accent and said that Senator Ervin is "out to slice the President and 'it offends me to see him come on so sweet when he isn't.'"

Another high White House aide said that Senator Howard Baker (Rep-Tenn.), the committee vice chairman, "has effectively deserted the President and the resentment runs high over here, but the feeling is to keep our mouths shut . . . I'm not going to."

OFFENSIVE

Five White House aides agreed to discuss the individual members of the Watergate committee, and all said they found Senator Lowell Weicker (Rep-Conn.), an outspoken critic of the White House, the most offensive. In several outbursts of moral indignation, Weicker has denounced the political espionage, dirty tricks, cover-up and deception which come under the heading of Watergate.

One White House source said that the President himself has denounced Weicker with an unflattering obscenity.

Two of the sources also criticized Senator Edward J. Gurney (Rep-Fla.), who is the strongest defender of the President. "Gurney is doing the only decent job of questioning," one source said, "but he is not pushing enough."

All the sources asked to remain unidentified. Several of them said that Leonard Garment and J. Fred Buzhardt, the White House attorneys representing the President on the Watergate, generally represent a so-called "soft-line" of cooperating with the Senate Watergate committee.

One of the advocates of a hard-line in the White House said: "This is not a legal struggle as Garment and Buzhardt see it — instead it is a political struggle and we

must counterattack politically and in the media."

CLOUD

The sources generally agreed that there is a cloud of gloom around the White House, almost a feeling of partial guilt for the crimes and deceptions of Watergate, that must be eliminated. Avenues of possible counterattack could be to:

- Charge that the Senate committee is blowing the Watergate out of proportion and diverting too much governmental attention to it, keeping the President from solving more important problems such as those of the economy.

- Blame the Watergate committee for "McCarthyism" — hearing unsupported charges.

- Charge the news media with bias and sensationalism of all Watergate allegations, including the televising of former presidential counsel John W. Dean's allegations against the President by all three television networks while the Senate committee witnesses who defend the President are broadcast on only one network on a rotating basis.

- Release a detailed de-

fense on the expenditure of \$1.3 million for the President's homes in San Clemente, Calif., and Key Biscayne, Fla., showing that the money was spent for legitimate security measures.

Although some White House aides do not feel a counterattack should be mounted, the sources said nearly all aides feel that there is no reason the President should appear chastened by the Watergate.