

3 Senators Plead for Decorum

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WASHINGTON, July 25—

In tones of the highest seriousness, the Watergate committee Senators today urged, admonished and instructed their "guests" in the gallery to behave themselves, not to forget the purpose of the hearings and not to turn them into a "circus, show or entertainment."

Three of the panel's members spoke out to calm the spectators — probably about 300 at the morning's peak—who wear their hearts on their sleeves.

The crowd, which ebbs and flows throughout the day but looks much the same at 4 P.M. as it does at 10 A.M., is an advertising man's dream of average America. There are blue-haired ladies and long-haired men and yawning children and men in sports shirts hoping to take snapshots of this newest national monument.

But they were not the same as the crowds that gave such overwhelming approval to President Nixon in the voting booths last November, that was another point in time. Today, it did indeed seem like a crowd out for a day at the circus — a Roman circus, perhaps more than Ringling Brothers.

The applause that greets every entrance of Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr., is routine by now. And so are the applause and laughter that greets the North Carolina Democrat's sallies, his eyebrow-punctuated verbal meanderings down the byways of folksiness.

But increasingly, another sort of laughter has become routine. Its derisive quality was unmistakable today, as when John D. Ehrlichman used the term "perfectly honest" to describe the sort of techniques he had thought might be employed to obtain confidential information from the files of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist — "by recruiting the assistance of another psychiatrist or of a doctor" through "false pretenses."

Triple Admonition

The spectators exploded with laughter at the word "honest." A few questions later there was more laughter, and then Senator Ervin asked the crowd to "refrain from expressing its approval or disapproval of anything which occurs in connection with the interrogation of the witness."

He was interrupted by Senator Herman E. Talmadge's agreement: "We are not conducting a show or entertainment program here," the Georgia Democrat said.

Senator Howard H. Baker Jr., Republican of Tennessee, agreed:



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Norman Mailer waiting to attend the Watergate hearings yesterday as a friend straightened his collar.

"This committee has a tough job," he said, adding that "it makes it infinitely tougher if we are cast in the role of conducting a circus or entertainment."

He said he hoped that "the guests of this committee" would "scrupulously adhere to that admonition of the chairman."

They didn't, although the disbelieving laughter was muted a bit. And later in the day, when Senator Ervin returned from a vote, he was once again greeted with an ovation, and once again he admonished the spectators.

'A Country Lawyer'

Inevitably, the committee members themselves are performers. Senator Ervin, the undisputed star, engaged in a courtly dialogue this morning with another constitutionalist, John J. Wilson, Mr. Ehrlichman's attorney.

After Mr. Wilson's opening discourse on the subject of the reservoir of power" made available to any President by the Constitution, Senator Ervin entered his disagreement by telling Mr. Wilson that he had enjoyed his argument, and that he himself was just "sort of a country lawyer" who sometimes became "sort of emphatic in the statement of my views, because I have never been able to straddle fences very well."

Then Senator Baker remarked, "The chairman is fond of pointing out from time to time that he is just a country lawyer. He omits to say that he graduated from Harvard Law School with honors."

After the laughter and applause that were duly noted in parentheses in the transcript, a blushing Senator Ervin put in "a word in my own defense," saying:

"I had a friend introduce me to a North Carolina audience. He said he understood that I was a graduate of Harvard Law School but that, God, nobody would ever suspect it." Again, (laughter).

Limited View

The audience in the caucus room can see only the back of the witness's head and shoulders, perhaps a hand now and then. What they missed, and what the television audience saw, was Mr. Ehrlichman's air of relaxation as he sat straight but

not stiff in his wide-sleeved gray suit, his hands quiet on the chair arms or his fingers linked in his lap when he was not using them to act out his words in a sort of restrained eurythmics.

Sometimes his gestures are explicit, as when he let his fingers do the walking across the brown felt cover of the witness table to illustrate how he and Judge William Matthew Byrne, the presiding judge in the Ellsberg-Russo case, took "a short walk" while discussing the possibility of a White House job offer.

Usually his arm gestures were more like those of a conductor, and like President Nixon's—only indirectly related to the words. There were flat-of-the-hand gestures, two-finger chops to the table top, glides and swirls, and occasionally a forefinger pointed at an interrogator with whom he disagreed.

Mr. Ehrlichman's willingness to disagree with his questioners has set him apart from most of those who have preceded him in the witness chair.

No Apology for Views

He is generally calm, if forceful, secure rather than contentious. Occasionally his self-assurance turns into irritation.

Much of today's session was devoted to an exploration of Mr. Ehrlichman's views—and those of the panel—on the nature and

scope of Presidential power and the propriety or otherwise of the witness's implementation of Presidential decisions. Mr. Ehrlichman has been quoted as saying, "The President is the Government," and there was nothing in his testimony today to indicate that he had changed his position.

Again in contrast to some previous witnesses, Mr. Ehrlichman offered his own views without apology, and with the seeming conviction of their rightness. No, he did

not think his conversations with Judge Byrne violated the legal profession's canon of ethics, he said, and he would be "very grateful" if Senator Daniel K. Inouye "could specify the canon that you feel applies here."

Some questions later, the Hawaii Democrat announced, "I have been sent this note from the chief counsel on the canon of ethics." As he went on to read it—"the attorney is under duty not to impair the confidence of the public and the integrity of the judiciary"—a smile of delight spread from face to face in the audience.

But Mr. Ehrlichman, his back to the gallery, was as necessarily blind to their faces as they were to his, and there was neither (laughter) nor (applause). He listened and said calmly that the canon in question, he was afraid, was just "a great catch-all."