

'Us' vs. 'Them'

By Aldo Beckman
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WASHINGTON — "Obviously, the committee is out to get him," remarked the senior White House aide "Obviously, they're putting on a show."

"They put a man on the witness stand for five days, and pat him on the shoulder and encourage him to accuse the President of all kinds of things, and then a senator looks up and says, in mock amazement. 'The people are losing confidence in their President.'"

Those remarks, tinged in sarcasm and uttered within the White House, reflect the growing hostility at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, and, reportedly, within the Oval Office itself toward the Senate Watergate committee.

Although no final decision on strategy has been reached, there is growing support for a savage attack on the Watergate committee, with the heaviest assaults reserved for Sen. Sam Ervin (Dem-N.C.), the chairman. But some heavy barrages also are ready for, and aimed at, Republican members of the committee.

President Nixon is reported to share the view of his top aides that the Senate inquiry has turned into a "partisan" exercise, with the committee members determined to "get" the President.

In addition to the growing hostility toward the Senate investigating committee,

White House Is Angry-- And Ready to Strike Back

there is the prevailing thought that the storm of Watergate will pass over and be no more than a bleep on the Nixon administration's charts of accomplishments when historians write the record of this decade.

Only a handful of trusted Presidential aides are involved in the day-to-day planning on how to react to the daily airing of the Senate hearings.

There is divided opinion among them whether the White House should remain mute and let the public interest die down or whether a concerted effort should be made to convince the American public that the committee motives are less than pure and, consequently, taint any evidence that reflects unfavorably on the Nixon White House.

The "attack" line is espoused by those still on the staff, who worked for, and were brought to the White House, by H. R. Haldeman. Some of them are the ones who comprised the "attack group" that so successfully zeroed in on the campaign of Sen. George McGovern last fall.

The ammunition against

the committee members is ready for use, if and when the President gives the nod.

Sen. Ervin's negative civil rights record will be a prime target for maximum public exposure if the attack is launched.

Newspaper stories about allegedly shady business dealings by Sen. Joseph M. Montoya (D.-N.M.) are ready for resurrection.

"Why doesn't somebody ask Sen. (Lowell) Weicker (R.-Conn.) about that \$70,000 we gave him for last year's campaign and which he never bothered to report?" asked one White House official.

"Why doesn't somebody ask Sen. (Howard) Baker (R.-Tenn.) about his requests for surrogates last fall and how a different cabinet officer was in Tennessee every week to help him," a White House official said, apparently trying to paint Baker's dogged cross-examination as the act of an ingrate.

Even Sen. Edward Gurney (R.-Fla.) considered the Nixon administration's best friend on the committee is not immune from White House criticism. "He should hit a lot harder than he does" one official remarked.

The wholesomeness of the hams produced by a food processing firm in which Sen. Herman Talmadge (D.-Ga.) is a principal owner is another likely target for probing by Nixon defenders, if the decision is made to attack.