

SF Examiner

Partisanship Perils the Probe

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WASHINGTON — The Senate Watergate Committee's investigation has disintegrated into a partisan political fight which threatens the future of public hearings already in doubt because of financial problems.

Committee sources said yesterday the staff is now seriously divided along party lines, with Democratic investigators concentrating on "dirty tricks" played by the Nixon reelection campaign organization and Republicans searching for anything that would embarrass Democratic politicians.

One source said certain incidents being probed by the Democrats are considered by some committee members as "too insignificant; while some angles being explored by the Republican staff appear far beyond the scope of the authorized committee inquiry.

FBI Memo

The Republicans, for example, are known to be investigating the political use of the FBI by former Presidents and isolated campaign finance transactions by 1972 Democratic Presidential contenders, especially Sen. Hubert Humphrey.

One minority investigator has been assigned to interview William C. Sullivan, former assistant FBI director and author of a still-secret memo detailing misuse of the bureau by former Presidents, notably Democrat Lyndon Johnson.

At the same time, sources confirmed reports that the committee has now run into financial problems and could be over its budget by the time the first phase of public hearings is scheduled to end October 15.

"This means we would have no money to continue the investigation when Congress resumes in January," said the source, a high-ranking staff member. "And there is no assurance that an agreement can be reached on what would be brought up at the hearings."

The staff member said the financial trouble stems from additional costs incurred by the lawsuit against President Nixon and a bulging committee staff now numbering more than 90 employees. Computed on a 12-month basis, the source said, the committee is now operating at a \$1.5 million annual cost — \$500,000 more than has been authorized by the Senate.

Sen. Sam Ervin, the committee chairman, recently ordered a hiring freeze on the majority staff, the source said, and there are indications that affidavits will be taken from some witnesses and simply read into the record to save expense.

Some committee staff members expressed the view that partisanship on the committee and divisions over whether the hearings should continue in January present a far greater threat to the committee's future than the dwindling budget.

Retaliation

Meanwhile, the majority and minority staffs are

going their separate ways, each side being eyed warily by the other. Sources described the situation as a "natural consequence" of the public displays of partisanship by Democrat Ervin and Republican Sen. Howard Baker during the closing days of testimony by top former Nixon aides John Erlichman and H. R. Halde-
man.

Since the hearing recess, the sources said, Democrats have been conducting a number of investigations which Republicans know little about. At the same time, the Baker-controlled minority staff has been retaliating.

While the Democratic probe seems aimed primarily at the activities of the accused dirty trickster, Donald Segretti, and the pranks played on Democratic Presidential contenders, the Republicans appear to be exploring any avenue which might show that the Democrats play politics just as dirty.