

Probe of Agnew Leaks Intensified

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Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson yesterday widened his investigation of possible government leaks in the probe of Vice President Spiro T. Agnew.

Responding to a stern command from President Nixon for a full investigation of the leaks, Richardson sent a letter to Agnew saying he has designated Glen E. Pommerening, the acting assistant attorney general for administration, "to undertake a systematic inquiry."

Richardson also wrote Ag-

new that he has alerted FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley "to cooperate by making available FBI personnel to assist in the inquiry as needed."

Agnew was informed Aug. 1 by George Beall, the U.S. attorney for Maryland, that he was under investigation for possible violations of bribery, extortion, conspiracy and tax law.

The investigation of the Vice President began as a probe of alleged kickbacks from engineering and architectural firms to Maryland political figures that is be-

ing conducted by Beall's staff in Baltimore.

At a press conference Tuesday Agnew complained about news leaks in the investigation, particularly an article in this week's Time magazine which said that "in the view of Justice Department officials in Washington, the case against him (Agnew) is growing steadily stronger and that an indictment appears inevitable."

The article also quoted "a Justice Department official" as saying that "at least three witnesses have told of delivering cash payoffs to Agnew."

The next day, Wednesday, President Nixon strongly condemned the leaks and said any Justice Department official responsible for them would be fired.

Richardson, who has insisted he has no evidence to indicate any law enforcement official did the leaking, wrote yesterday that he has "persistently tried to find out whether or not 'sources close to the investigation' were indeed employees of the Department of Justice."

The Time article "compounds the problem," he

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continued, "and I have expanded the efforts already underway to determine whether and to what extent the department has been the source of past leaks and to prevent any future leaks."

Pommerening will have "any and all department resources" to use "as he sees fit," Richardson said. A Justice Department spokesman stressed that the FBI has not been called in to investigate Justice personnel but has been alerted in case it appears a federal law has been broken.

Richardson's letter underlined the point by reminding Agnew that no information about his case has been submitted to a grand jury and adding:

"Leaks of grand jury proceedings are, of course, subject to criminal sanction, but leaks at prior stages of an investigation are not." Therefore, a source said, a formal FBI investigation will not be needed unless and until information goes to a grand jury.

But Richardson, alluding to Mr. Nixon's warning, said, "Should any of the leaks be traced to Department of Justice personnel, departmental regulations providing administrative sanctions, including dismissal, will apply."

The department's public information director, John W. Hushen, said late yesterday, "We have turned up no evidence that departmental personnel are the sources" of the leaks.

Richardson, reflecting widespread Justice Depart-

ment feeling that leaks could have come from other sources—even from the White House's and Agnew's own staffs—wrote:

"As you know, a considerable number of people in and out of government are aware of some details of the investigation. Its outlines are known to a number of witnesses, individuals under investigation, their lawyers, select members of my, your, and the White House staff, and certain investigative personnel of the Internal Revenue Service.

"For this reason, there may be no fully effective means of stopping the cynical rumors and conjectures all too evident in recent weeks."

Richardson added that "we can, however, continue to insist that those in our employ behave with extraordinary circumspection."

Richardson's speculation about other possible sources of leaks came as an Associated Press story was filed quoting unnamed Justice Department and Agnew staffers as saying the White House might be involved.

"There are two people at the White House who are kept fully informed on what our findings are," a Justice official told AP, referring to Mr. Nixon and his chief of staff Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr. "It's not inconceivable that information could have filtered down through other staff from them and gotten out that way."

At San Clemente, deputy White House press secretary Gerald L. Warren called reports of White House leaks "totally false." Asked if some-

one on the White House staff could have leaked without his knowledge, Warren replied, "Absolutely not."

The Attorney General, it was learned, also asked Donald C. Alexander, commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service, to see if leaks might have come from his agents. An IRS spokesman said he was unaware of the request and had not been able to reach Alexander, who was in Montreal to address the National Society of Public Accountants.

In his letter Richardson also sought to assuage Agnew's anger over reports that Beall was unsure that he wanted to interview the Vice President about the case even though Agnew had expressed willingness to be questioned.

Agnew insisted Tuesday that he still wants to tell his side of the case to the prosecutors.

"Certainly you should and will be given an opportunity to tell the prosecution all that you feel appropriate," Richardson wrote.

The Attorney General told Agnew that he and Beall "appreciate your past and present offers of cooperation in the investigation."

Another Justice Department spokesman, Horace S. Webb, said Richardson's inquiry into possible department leaks began Aug. 7, the day newspaper stories appeared saying the Vice President had been notified by Beall that he was being investigated.