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Petersen Is Watergate's Prober Again

SFChronicle
Washington.

The administration returned prosecution of the Watergate case yesterday to Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen, who once expressed anger that he had been taken off it in the first place.

Acting Attorney General Robert H. Bork, who finally fired special prosecutor Archibald Cox Saturday night after his two bosses would not, told reporters Petersen would have "direct charge of the Watergate case and all related matters . . ."

Refusing to answer reporters' questions, Bork said Petersen "will use the evidence and the staff already assembled as well as other department personnel to see that these cases are pressed to a conclusion and that justice is done."

FIRING

Mr. Nixon fired Cox be-

cause the special prosecutor vowed to go forward with court attempts to obtain the tapes and other White House documents despite Mr. Nixon's orders not to do so.

Presumably, Petersen will not seek the tapes and documents.

Petersen was in charge of the criminal investigation of former Vice President Spiro T. Agnew that led, earlier this month, to Agnew's resignation and plea of no contest to income tax evasion.

As the final witness August 7 in the Senate Watergate committee's first round of public hearings, Petersen said: "Now one of the things, you will excuse me, I have to get something off my chest. I resent the appointment of a special prosecutor. Damn it, I think it is a reflection on me and the Department of Justice . . . The department had that case going and it was snatched away from us and I don't think it fair to criticize us because at that point we didn't have the evidence to go forward."

ROLE

Bork, a former Yale professor, said that he saw his job as a caretaker operation now that Elliot L. Richardson

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son has resigned as attorney general and Deputy Attorney General William D. Ruckelshaus was fired from his post.

"My job is to keep the Department of Justice operating effectively until such time as the President nominates and the Senate confirms a new attorney general."

Bork said he did not plan any personnel changes.

"On the contrary, I will ask all employees to keep the department on course." He said he would meet with top department officials to ask for their support and counsel.

Bork said he also was going to continue support for legislation, sent to Congress by the Justice Department, to extend the life of the Watergate grand jury for at least six months.

REFUSAL

Bork, who read his statement and refused to answer reporters' questions, said Mr. Nixon gave him this guideline for his new job.

"It is my expectation that the Department of Justice will continue with full vigor the investigations and prosecutions that had been entrusted to the Watergate special prosecution force," Bork quoted Mr. Nixon as saying.

Bork said he met with Petersen, who is in charge of



HENRY E. PETERSON
He's in charge again

the Justice Department criminal division, and advised him of Mr. Nixon's directive.

"Mr. Petersen, of course, would not have it any other way and neither would I," Bork said.

In describing his role, Bork said, "I hope to preserve for that future attorney general the programs and initiatives" begun by Elliot Richardson.

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