Nixon Backs Down After
A 'Firestorm' of Protest

The firing of Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox and the President's compromise on the Watergate tapes issue (which he confidently had expected to please the public as well as U. S. District Judge Sirica) instead seemed to have released unexpected depths of outrage and even fears.

The rapid sequence of events that had touched off what White House Chief of Staff Alexander Haig called a "firestorm of controversy" was roughly:

- President Nixon on Friday night announced his compromise on the Watergate tapes issue. Judge Sirica had ordered Attorney General William Richardson to fire Cox for insubordination.
- On Saturday the President ordered Attorney General Elliot Richardson to fire Cox. Bork did.
- The President then ordered Solicitor General Robert Bork to take over as Acting Attorney General and fire Cox. Bork did.
- Deluge of Telegrams

It was this combination of events that had aroused the "firestorm" of protest. Western Union in Washington reported the heaviest deluge of telegrams ever recorded in a 36-hour period — over 71,000, most for Congress, some for the White House. An Oliver Quayle Poll found 75 per cent disapproved the firing of Cox and 48 per cent thought the President should resign.

Senator Kennedy (Dem.-Mass.) even charged that "evidence is now beginning to accumulate that Mr. Cox may have been fired for reasons that originally had nothing to do with the tapes, and that the tapes compromise was a sham, a pretext, to fire the Special Prosecutor because Archi-
Richardson at a Tuesday press conference confirmed that Cox had expanded his investigations beyond Watergate and said he believed Cox was right. He also recommended a new special prosecutor be appointed.

The White House's own explanation was somewhat different. "He (Cox) questioned the reliability of Stennis, his ability to determine the relevancy of deleted material and even about the veracity of the tape themselves—which we felt was insulting ..."

Sirica's Courtroom
Judge Sirica's courtroom was packed when he opened the hearing at 2:07 last Tuesday afternoon. It was up to the President's lawyer, Charles Alan Wright to "sell" the compromise.

It was tough Judge Sirica who had kept Watergate from remaining merely a goofy burglary, had insisted that more probing be done. He, as much as the press, was responsible for insisting the widespread wrongdoing be uncovered.

Instead of introducing the compromise, however, Wright stepped up to the bench and delivered another surprise: "I am authorized to say that the President of the United States would comply in all respects with the order of August 29 as modified by the order of the Court of Appeals . . ."

The President, he said, had hoped the compromise would "end a constitutional crisis" but obviously it had not. "There would have been those who would have said, 'The President is defying the law.' This President does not defy the law and he has authorized me to say he will comply in full . . ."

'I'm Very Happy'
As he retired to his chambers, Sirica could not suppress a smile. "I'm not going to start gloating over this thing like a lot of people. I'm very happy, like any judge would be, about the position taken by the President."

Wright said the tapes would be indexed and submitted as "expeditiously as possible," perhaps in a few days.

Thus would the full weight of the controversy fall on the shoulders of Judge Sirica. Not only would it be his responsibility to listen to the tapes and sort out "national security" talk from Watergate material, he would also have to decide whether to name someone to act as special prosecutor in Cox's place.