

president

Nixon Backs Down After A 'Firestorm' of Protest

HONKING horns shattered the quiet of the White House over the long Veteran's Day holiday. Pickets carrying signs saying "Honk for Impeachment" walked up and down outside the iron fence under the watchful eyes of police.

Thousands of Washingtonians stopped to pick up "Impeach Nixon" bumper stickers (3000) and sign petitions (5000 names) urging the President's impeachment.

Barbara Stephens said she had sold her diamond ring and 44 pieces of silver to pay for the bumper stickers. Jim Goodnow of Baltimore said, "We both voted for Nixon because he said he had a secret plan to end the war. Now he's got a secret plan to end the Justice Department."

'A Firestorm'

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 John 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 "a firestorm of controversy" was roughly:

- President Nixon on Friday presented a compromise on the Watergate tapes. Judge Sirica had ordered produced last August 29. He himself would prepare a "summary" of the pertinent passages of the tapes. Senator John Stennis (Dem.-Miss.), chairman of the Armed Service Committee, would compare what he heard and the summary and make any changes he wished.

Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox would forthwith halt any further attempt to

obtain the tapes, memoranda, notes or other documents having to do with presidential conversations.

- Senator Sam Ervin (Dem.-N.C.) and Howard Baker (Rep.-Tenn.) were flown from their homes by the Air Force to the White House to hear the compromise—and had presumably approved it.

- Cox had refused to approve the compromise, but said he was willing to submit it to Judge Sirica and if the court accepted it, he would too. But he could not obey the President's directive to stop trying to obtain documents (some of which, he emphasized, had been promised him by the White House last June, but never delivered) or carry out his full investigation.

To comply, Cox told a press conference, would "violate my promise" to the Senate and the nation to use the courts to challenge "exaggerated claims of executive privilege" and to prosecute any "who abused high government office." Also, he said, the tape summary might not be admissible in court.

- On Saturday the President ordered Attorney General Elliot Richardson to fire Cox for insubordination. Richardson, who had cancelled a fishing holiday in Idaho to be on hand for the showdown, refused to fire Cox and resigned instead. He could, he said, not go back on his promise to the Senate that "the Attorney General will not countermand or interfere with the special prosecutor's decisions or actions."

- The President, through Haig, then ordered Deputy Attorney General William Ruckelshaus to fire Cox. Ruckelshaus refused.

Instead Ruckelshaus wrote a letter of resignation: "... My conscience will not permit me to carry out your instruction to discharge Archi-

bald Cox. My disagreement with that action at this time is too fundamental to permit me to act otherwise."

- President Nixon then ordered Solicitor General Robert Bork to take over as Acting Attorney General and fire Cox. Bork did.

- The President ordered the FBI to seal off the Special Prosecutor's office and keep him and his 81 men away. The office itself would be abolished and become part of the Justice Department.

- Bork named Assistant Attorney General Henry Petersen to take over the Watergate investigation and prosecution — but both he (Bork) and Petersen agreed to abide by President Nixon's restrictions on their investigation.

Deluge of Telegrams

It was this combination of events that had aroused the "firestorm" of protest. Western Union in Washing-

The FBI was told to seal off the prosecutor's office

ton 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-



AP Wirephoto

PROTESTERS OUTSIDE THE WHITE HOUSE

bald Cox was too hot on the White House trail."

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' place.

RICHARDSON
RUCKELSHAUS
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COX
UPI Telephoto



PETERSEN
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STENNIS
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