

The Cox Firing

Magazine Says Richardson Denied He Lied

New York

Charges by President Nixon and White House Chief of Staff Alexander Haig that former Attorney General Elliot Richardson lied about his role in the dismissal of the special Watergate prosecutor have been called "clearly and demonstrably untrue" by Richardson, Time magazine reported yesterday.

The White House charges against Richardson, who resigned as attorney general rather than obey a presidential order to fire special prosecutor Archibald Cox, came out of two of the meetings Mr. Nixon held last week with Republican senators.

At one point according to Time, the President told Senator Charles Mathias (Rep-Md.) that Richardson "wasn't telling the truth."

This comment came after Mathias noted that Haig's claim that Richardson had originated the idea of halting efforts by Cox to seek presidential documents and tapes through court action contradicted sworn testimony by Richardson before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Mr. Nixon and Haig also reportedly told the senators that Richardson had approved Mr. Nixon's plan to stop Cox from pursuing court action—a stand that led to what has been called the "Saturday night massacre" in the Justice Department—and that Richardson had agreed with the plan to have Mississippi Senator

John Stennis "authenticate" transcripts of White House tapes sought by the prosecutor.

Richardson told Time he had helped draw up the Stennis plan but had threatened to resign when told by Haig that Cox would be fired if he did not go along.

Richardson said he had asked for a meeting with Mr. Nixon on the Friday morning before the Stennis plan was announced to present his resignation. Richardson met with Haig and the chief of staff agreed to drop the idea of firing Cox, according to Richardson's account.

That night, however, Richardson told the magazine, he received a letter from the President; linking the Stennis plan with an order to Cox forbidding him to seek any more presidential documents in court.

Richardson said he immediately telephoned presidential adviser Bryce Harlow and was led to believe that the White House would back down on the Cox order. But when the President made the Stennis "authentication" proposal public a few hours later, the Cox order was still part of the deal.

This led to the resignation of Richardson and his deputy, William Ruckelshaus, and to the firing of Cox by Robert Bork, who had been named acting attorney general.

The Washington Post said yesterday that seven docu-

ments turned over to the Senate Judiciary Committee by Richardson, some of which had not been publicly released, appeared to support his version of the incidents.

Senate Democratic Leader Mike Mansfield said yesterday that Haig, Cox and Richardson should be called before the Judiciary Committee "pronto" to seek a clarification of the events.

Reuters