

Watergate Unit Pressing Hughes Aides

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 30 — The Senate Watergate Committee is preparing for a show-down next week with a dozen employes of Howard R. Hughes who have refused to answer the committee's subpoenas.

The committee, which has recessed its public hearings until after Jan. 1 to provide more time for the staff to gather evidence, is investigating a \$100,000 cash payment made by representatives of Mr. Hughes, the billionaire industrialist, to Charles G. Rebozo, President Nixon's friend.

Mr. Rebozo has said that he kept the \$100 bills untouched in a safe deposit box for three years and then returned them this year to Chester C. Davis, a lawyer for the Hughes organization.

Skepticism on Panel

The committee's investigators are clearly skeptical that the money lay unused during the three years that it was in Mr. Rebozo's possession. They are also questioning the purpose of the payment.

The committee issued a subpoena for the 1,001 hundred-dollar bills three weeks ago, but Mr. Davis refused to turn over the money. He led the investigators to believe he still had the money and agreed to tell the committee the serial numbers on the bills, but the investigators insisted on seeing the actual bills.

Mr. Davis also told the committee staff that he and the other subpoenaed Hughes employes, who are his clients, would refuse to answer questions in a closed session with the staff and would respond to inquiries only in an open committee hearing.

Mr. Davis filed a suit in United States District Court here, asking the court to prohibit the committee from requiring testimony in other than an open session.

The committee's lawyers believe that there are no grounds for the suit or for Mr. Davis's refusal to allow testimony in private sessions. All the other witnesses to appear in open hearings have undergone staff inquiry first.

The law is specific, committee officials noted, in allowing Congressional committees to hold closed hearings if the testimony "may tend to reflect adversely on the character or reputation of the witness or any other individual."

"If they're not hiding something, what are they scared of?" one investigator remarked today. "I think they are afraid that something more might come out, and we're trying to find out what that something is."

The law also allows closed hearings if "national security" matters are to be discussed.

An investigation said that the Hughes employes would be questioned about the relationship between F. Donald Nixon, the President's brother, and the Hughes organization.

The President said two weeks ago that the Secret Service had wiretapped his brother's telephones to protect his brother, "particularly [from] anybody who might be in a foreign country."

Lawyers for the committee are convinced that Mr. Davis is trying to stall, hoping that through procedural maneuvers he can keep himself and his clients from being questioned until after the committee has adjourned its hearings permanently. The committee is scheduled to file its final report by the end of February.

Repeated attempts this week to obtain Mr. Davis's view on the matter were unsuccessful. He has refused to return telephone calls.

Mr. Davis is to be called before the committee early next week to show cause why he and his clients will not answer the subpoenas. The panel is expected to reject his reasons, and, according to the committee's lawyers, to vote then

to hold the Hughes employes in contempt.

The committee is hoping that the contempt vote will be a sufficient threat to force the witnesses' testimony. If it is not the committee has two possible courses of action.

After the White House today, the deputy Presidential press secretary, Gerald L. Warren, charged the committee's deputy counsel, Rufus L. Edmisten, with making misleading statements in a speech last night.

Mr. Edmisten told students at Sweetbriar College in Virginia that President Nixon spent 12 hours on May 4 listening to tapes of his Watergate conversations and that the committee planned to subpoena the recording of the President's listening session.

The White House has said that the President listened to the tapes on June 4 but used earphones. Thus, none of the tapes would have been recorded again.

Mr. Edmisten, after hearing of Mr. Warren's remarks, said, "I think I had misinformation that there was a tape made of the tapes the President had listened to. If I made a mistake, I'm sorry."