

THE COMMITTEE

Lost Momentum and Broken Unity

Since returning from a well-deserved one-month recess in September, Sam Ervin's Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities has never regained the earlier momentum of its investigation into the Watergate mess and other scandals. Last week, on the day that it had been scheduled to begin examining publicly one of several pieces of important unfinished business, the seven-member committee suddenly voted to suspend its hearings indefinitely—until January at the earliest. The decision helped underscore the factionalism and frustration that has lately shaken the committee's once solid and purposeful ranks.

The delay was caused in part by snags in the two major inquiries still on

with the Hughes organization have filed suit in federal court to prevent the committee from forcing them to testify in preliminary sessions prior to any public appearances. The committee is scheduled to hold a closed meeting this week to consider whether it should begin contempt proceedings against five Hughes men. Further, the committee has subpoenaed the \$100 bills used in the transaction, which Rebozo claims were stored for three years in a safe-deposit box and were finally returned unspent.

Five days before the committee was slated to begin the new round of public hearings into the two big contributions, the head of the milk-deal investigation, David Dorsen, visited Chief Counsel

leaders, sensing that Gurney is politically vulnerable no matter what the legal outcome of his case, have begun mounting campaigns to challenge him next year, when he is up for re-election.

Connecticut Republican Lowell Weicker Jr., by contrast, was very much in attendance at the Tuesday meeting. He argued with his usual aggressiveness that a new date for hearings should be set immediately. Weicker, who has used his own staff to turn up evidence damaging to the President and easily ranks as the committee's hardest-working member, is viewed by some other Republicans as the unseemly instigator of a vendetta against Nixon. In addition, many critics believe that he aims to ride the committee hearings to higher office in a post-Watergate Administration.

Tennessee's Howard Baker, the self-appointed committee peacemaker, suggested that the unit simply schedule any further hearings "at the call of the chairman." That plan eventually passed, with Weicker casting the only dissenting vote. Having thus argued that the hearings should continue when Ervin sees fit, Baker then undercut the committee's future after being asked at a press conference whether the group might hold no more hearings at all. Baker replied that he did not "exclude the possibility that we might not." Some of his aides also privately leaked stories that the committee staff has assembled only weak evidence in the milk and Rebozo investigations. Some committee staff members suspect that Baker, who agreed to Nixon's discredited and abortive "compromise" on the presidential tapes and may have helped sell the idea to Ervin, believes that the committee has gone far enough and would like to let it wither away.

Closer to Tapes. Dash insists that no such whimpering end is in store. "We already have plenty of evidence to put on," says Dash. "We have an excellent set of hearings to produce, and they will be held."

In addition, Congress is close to providing a special imprimatur to the committee in its efforts to get presidential tapes and other evidence that the White House has refused to release. A bill that would provide authority for federal courts to rule on the conflict has passed the Senate and been approved by the House Judiciary Committee. If the bill is also passed by the full House, as is expected this week, Dash plans to file suit immediately for the material.

In fact, though most of the 70-man staff is already at work on the preliminary draft of the committee's final report and recommendations on Watergate, some members doubt that all unfinished business can be cleared by Feb. 28, when the committee is scheduled to close down for good. Should it need more time, Ervin's committee would probably have no trouble winning a new lease on life from the Senate. Thus all those Senator Sam T shirts may come back in vogue before long.



SENATORS WEICKER, GURNEY (SEATED) & ERVIN CONFERRING ON WATERGATE
Postponed: hearings on milk and Bebe Rebozo.

the committee's agenda. In its investigation into any connection between the milk producers' contributions of at least \$527,500 to President Nixon's re-election campaign and a 1971 increase in federal price supports for milk (TIME, Dec. 3), committee staffers have not had time to interview several important witnesses. The investigators have been further hampered by the White House's refusal to provide documents relating to the case.

Five in Contempt? The other inquiry involves a gift in 1969 and 1970 of \$100,100 from an executive in the business empire of Superbillionaire Howard Hughes to Charles G. ("Bebe") Rebozo, Nixon's best friend, for what Rebozo says were campaign purposes. The Hughes organization has refused to honor several committee subpoenas. Five prospective witnesses connected

Sam Dash in what a committee source described as "a panic." Dorsen pleaded that he was simply not prepared to begin a public hearing. After reviewing his work, Dash agreed, and told the staff on Monday that he would recommend a postponement to committee members the next day. What happened at that Tuesday meeting in Sam Ervin's office revealed the divergent courses, both personal and political, of a group that Ervin once boasted had always taken unanimous votes.

Florida Republican Edward Gurney did not even attend. Under investigation by the Justice Department on suspicion of having unlawfully failed to report contributions received from contractors in 1971 and 1972, Gurney has grown increasingly absorbed in his own problems and has spent less time on the committee business. Several Florida Republican