

SFChronicle MAY 2 1974

# First Prosecutor's Talks

Washington

President Nixon warned the Justice Department in April of 1973 that any inquiry into his personal involvement in the Watergate coverup would be "dangerous to the presidency," the edited White House transcripts show.

The transcripts disclose that by late April Mr. Nixon was meeting regularly with Henry E. Petersen, a deputy attorney general in charge of the Watergate case, and won from Petersen a pledge

that "we have no mandate to investigate the President."

By that time John W. Dean III, then the White House counsel, had begun a series of meetings with the original Watergate prosecuting team. Those conversations eventually became the basis for the widespread inquiry into Mr. Nixon's activities.

On April 27, according to the transcript, Mr. Nixon was extremely agitated by a report — apparently re-

laid from one of his staff aides — that the New York Times and the Washington Post had learned that Dean was implicating him in his discussions with the prosecutors, headed by Earl J. Silbert, an assistant U.S. attorney.

"We've got to head them off at the pass," Mr. Nixon told Petersen, "because it's so damned — so damn dangerous to the presidency."

"If there's one thing you have got to do," the President added a moment later,

"you have got to maintain the presidency out of this. I have got things to do for this country . . ."

Petersen subsequently assured the President that he had told the prosecutors that "we have to draw the line. We have no mandate to investigate the President. We investigate Watergate."

The President's outspoken concern about an investigation into his personal involvement in the coverup was one of the highlights of

## With Nixon

the 1258 - page compendium of edited transcripts, plus a 50 - page legal argument, that were turned over Tuesday by the White House to the House Judiciary Committee and publicly released.

The April 27 conversation, the last of 46 edited transcripts, culminated an intense relationship between Mr. Nixon and Petersen in which the Justice Department official repeatedly expressed his faith in the innocence of the President.

From mid - April on, the transcripts show Petersen was providing the President with regular and detailed reports on the progress of the Watergate grand jury as well as information about the unofficial inquiries by the federal prosecutors.

During those weeks, according to the transcripts, the President was resisting intense pressure from Petersen and from some White House aides, among them Leonard Garment, to either dismiss or temporarily relieve his two key deputies, H. R. Haldeman, the White House chief of staff, and John D. Ehrlichman, his do-

mestic adviser .

Much of the President's time with Petersen was spent in going over the accumulated evidence against the two men, and in urging that Dean not be given immunity by the prosecutor to testify against them.

On April 27, however, the President's concern — as reflected in the edited transcripts — abruptly shifted from Haldeman and Ehrlichman to his own legal status.

"If Dean is implicating the presidency," he told Petersen, "we are going to damned well find out about it." The President, apparently concerned about the implications of his March 21 conversation with Dean in which huge money payments were discussed, told the deputy attorney general that "my purpose (in speaking to Dean) was to find out what the hell had been going on."

"And believe me," he said, "nothing was approved. I mean as far as I's concerned — it was turned off totally."

"You've got to believe,

me," the President said a moment later. "I am after the truth, even if it hurts me."

"But believe me" he repeated, "it won't."

Petersen later assured the President that Dean was not implicating him directly — as the reporters for the New York Times and the Washington Post were alleging. "I know you can't believe these reporters all the time," Petersen said.

"I'm glad we have that then," the President responded with obvious relief. "When I heard that, I thought that Dean must be out of his damned mind or something."

Mr. Nixon then summoned Ronald L. Ziegler, his press secretary, and briskly told him, "Well, kill it. Kill it, hard."

"Take a hard line," he added, in reference to the Washington Post. "Anything on that (Dean's alleged implication of the President) and they better watch their damned cotton-picking faces."

"Because boy," the President went on, "if there's one

San Francisco Chronicle 9

★ ★ Thur., May 2, 1974



HENRY E. PETERSEN  
Deputy Attorney General

thing in this case as Henry will tell you, since March 21st when I had that conversation with Dean, I have broken my ass to get the facts of this case."

Justice department officials said yesterday that Petersen's role in relaying grand jury and other information to Mr. Nixon had been perfectly proper and in keeping with his official responsibilities.

New York Times