

Ziegler Blasts Leaks, Demands Open Hearings

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President Nixon's chief spokesman yesterday accused members of the House Judiciary Committee of deliberately distorting Mr. Nixon's role in the Watergate affair by calculated leaks of partial information to reporters.

Press secretary Ronald Ziegler demanded that the committee immediately open to the public its closed impeachment hearings.

"This calculated and piecemeal parceling out of information from the committee's supposedly private sessions has violated not just the committee's own rules but the most basic sense of fairness and justice," Ziegler said after conferring with Mr. Nixon.

His remarks reinforced a request Thursday by presidential counsel James D. St. Clair that the hearings, now held in closed sessions, be immediately opened to the public.

Ziegler directed particular criticism at committee members who, he said, "after hearing only a few days of evidence are distorting that evidence, are making pronouncements of prejudgments about the President and are setting aside any and all considerations of due process."

Rules of due process have "totally broken down" in the proceedings, Ziegler said "and the result is that the country is being seriously and calculatedly misled about the facts.

"Certain members of the committee and the committee staff are trying to have it both ways — ostensible fairness and impartiality professed in the rules adopted while partisan and public announcements in piecemeal fashion of information

that creates a negative inference against the President.

"This argues for the committee (members) to open their hearings now so the American people can judge whether they are fair."

Judiciary chairman Peter Rodino declined St. Clair's request Thursday, and had no immediate comment yesterday. The hearings are in recess until next week.

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