

Coverup May Still Exist, Probers Say

Washington

The chairman of the House Judiciary Committee said yesterday that President Nixon's dismissal of Archibald Cox last fall and his continuing refusal to give White House evidence to Congress and the courts raised doubts about whether the Watergate coverup ever ended.

Some others on the committee expressed the same misgivings.

Representative Peter W. Rodino Jr. (Dem.-N.J.) discussed the coverup issue with reporters during a recess in the second day of the impeachment panel's closed hearings on the ouster of Cox last October 20 from the post of Watergate special prosecutor.

Rodino said it was "a very pertinent question," based on events leading up to and following Cox' dismissal,

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whether the coverup might still be continuing.

Among the matters examined by the Judiciary committee yesterday were the belated White House disclosure, a month after Mr. Nixon learned of it last year, that two of the nine Watergate tape recordings Cox had subpoenaed did not exist, and the erasure of an 18½-minute segment of a potentially important Watergate recording.

The committee also was said to have obtained an affidavit in which Elliot L. Richardson, who resigned his post as attorney general rather than carry out the

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President's order to discharge Cox, told of threats by the White House to "get rid of Cox" as early as July,

1973.

Rodino said a demonstration for the committee showed that the 18-minute buzz on the Watergate tape "can't possibly" have been caused by anything but hand operation.

He said a staff aide made the demonstration on a Uher 5000 tape recorder. It was the same kind that produced the gap and buzz on the tape of a June 20, 1972, conversation between Mr. Nixon and his former chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman.

A report by a panel of experts also concluded that the buzz could not have been produced by a faulty tape recorder rather than hand operation, but the President's lawyer, James D. St. Clair, said the conclusion could not be that absolute.

Special impeachment counsel John Doar said the committee does not have an FBI report on who might have erased the tape and said there is no assurance that report will be completed and delivered before the impeachment inquiry concludes.

The suggestion that the committee was considering a possible continuation of coverup efforts was also implicit in the period of time involved in the chronological presentation of evidence to the committee. A statement issued by Rodino said that the evidence bore on "certain events" between Oct. 19, 1973 — one day before Cox was dismissed — and June 10, 1974, a little over a week ago.

The presentation also summarized what the committee already knew, that the President had refused to honor Judiciary Committee requests and subpoenas for more than 150 recordings, and was contesting a subpoena from Leon Jaworski, Cox' successor, for 64 Watergate-related tapes.

Most Republicans on the committee generally discounted the significance of the evidence presented Tuesday and yesterday, saying that it did not vary from what had been published over a period of months. Representative Delbert L. Latta of Ohio called the evi-

dence inconsequential.

Others on the panel, including a few Republicans, voiced concerns similar to Rodino's.

Representative Edward Mezvinsky (Dem.-Iowa), said "the suspicions are there" that the attempted coverup is still going on.

"That's the reason we're going into it," he said. "It is not a frivolous matter."

Another Democrat, Representative Barbara Jordan of Texas, told reporters that she believed it was "still open to interpretation" that Cox had been discharged as "part of a continued coverup." Miss Jordan said the dismissal posed two central questions:

"Was it motivated by suppression of evidence? Was this in fact obstruction of justice?"

Each of the members raising the issue added that no conclusions had been drawn from the evidence. Rodino said he was merely acknowledging that possible continuation of the coverup was "a proper area for investigation."

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