

Prosecutor Rejects New Probe of Ford

Washington

Special Watergate Prosecutor Charles Ruff said yesterday he has decided against an investigation into allegations that President Ford and officials of the Nixon White House discussed blocking the first Watergate investigations.

Ruff, however, left open the possibility that an investigation into Mr. Ford's role might be handled by the Justice Department.

In a letter to Democratic Representatives Elizabeth Holtzman of New York and John Conyers of Michigan, Ruff said neither "previously available information" nor recent statements by former White House Counsel John W. Dean III are enough to justify a new investigation.

At issue is whether Mr. Ford, when he was House minority lead-

er, acted at the request of former President Nixon, and led efforts to cut short an early Watergate investigation by the late Wright Patman (Dem-Tex.), chairman of the House Banking and Currency Committee.

Patman had urged the committee to investigate the laundering of funds later disclosed to have fi-

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nanced the original Watergate break-in.

Opposed by the Republicans on the committee and a few Democrats, the proposed investigation was disapproved and it was not until later congressional investigations that the Watergate scandals were exposed.

Mr. Ford testified during his vice presidential confirmation hearings that although he urged the Patman committee not to investigate Watergate in September and October, 1972, he did so independently with no discussions on the issue with White House officials.

Dean said in a television interview earlier this week, however, that former White House lobbyist Richard K. Cook had regular contacts with Mr. Ford, who in turn was talking to Republicans on the committee and seeking to thwart the investigation.

Cook has denied ever speaking with Mr. Ford on the need to deny Patman subpoena power, as alleged by Dean.

Henry Reuss (Dem-Wis.), who succeeded Patman as Banking and Currency Committee chairman, yesterday reiterated his request that Ruff both listen to and publicly release any taped 1972 conversations between Mr. Ford and Mr. Nixon about moves to block the panel's Watergate probe.

Reuss accused Mr. Ford of "stonewalling" attempts to pin down his role in thwarting the Patman investigation, saying the President had "ducked the question" at his news conference Thurs-

day night. 14 OCT

In his letter to the House members, Ruff also denied Conyers access to White House tapes, which Dean has indicated would demonstrate Mr. Ford's White House contacts on Watergate questions.

Ruff said that any investigation into discrepancies in Mr. Ford's testimony during his confirmation hearings "would not be within the jurisdiction of the Special Prosecutor's Office, but would rather be a matter within the general authority of the Department of Justice."

An aide said Conyers will ask Attorney General Edward Levi to turn any such investigation over to Ruff, as he did allegations that Mr. Ford used political contributions for personal expenses.

Only Thursday, Ruff cleared Mr. Ford of any wrongdoing in that case.

Ruff did not say in his letter if he had reviewed White House tapes cited by Dean. Nor did he say if he had interviewed Cook. An aide to Conyers said, "It is our understanding that he didn't talk to Cook."

Holtzman took issue with Ruff's contention that he did not have jurisdiction and she urged him to reconsider.

"Mr. Ruff's refusal even to consider the question whether Gerald Ford was concealing, in his confirmation hearings, instructions from the White House to block the Banking and Currency Committee investigations is inexcusable," she said.

"President Ford may be completely innocent," she said. "In fairness to him and in fairness to the American people this issue should be resolved now."

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