

Nixon Interview



Jack Anderson

WHEN Richard Nixon faces the television cameras for his first interview since he abandoned the White House, he'll be cross-examined as if he were on the witness stand.

Television interviewer David Frost, in the strictest of secrecy, has drawn up a set of questions that would satisfy a Watergate prosecutor. If Nixon balks over the rough line of questioning, the entertainer turned investigator may take legal action to compel him to reply.

Sources close to Frost say that any refusal to answer the hard questions would "not be in the spirit of the contract," which provides for an estimated \$750,000 payment to the former president. They consider a lawsuit, however, only an "extreme possibility."

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FROST, in a guarded talk with us from Paris, played down any such possibility. "I think," he said, "that (Nixon) wants to confront his past." Frost declined further comment.

To prevent the questions from leaking out before the taping session with Nixon next March, Frost has written harsh confidentiality clauses into the contracts with his three researchers. Nevertheless, we have learned that pointed questions will be put to Nixon:

• Was he responsible for the criminal erasure of the famous 18 and one half-minute tape segment, which might have implicated him much earlier in the Watergate coverup?

• Does Nixon know of any other illegal acts, besides those already in print, that the White House plumbers carried out?

• Is he aware of other improper activities, not yet revealed, of the FBI, Central Intelligence Agency and Internal Revenue Service?

• Did Nixon authorize the so-called "Kissinger wiretaps" of newsmen and Kissinger aides? Did he approve any other wiretaps?

Frost also plans to ask the deposed President personal questions about his emotional reactions and his phlebitis attack after he was forced out of the White House. And there will be historical questions, of course, about Nixon's role in ending the Vietnam war, negotiating the detente with Russia and China, the SALT talks, and the military coup in Chile.

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FROST will conduct 12 two-hour, raw interviews with Nixon at San Clemente. These will be compressed into four shows, each to run 90 minutes. Frost hopes to put the programs on the air during consecutive weeks, beginning in May.

He wrote into his contract a clause that no one, including Nixon, will have the right to edit the raw material but Frost himself. He has hired three crack investigators — James Reston Jr., Phil Stanford and Robert Zelnick — to help him with the basic research. Clearly, the famous TV interviewer will pull no punches.