

Poster

Simmering Nixon's Goose

A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

The room where they are doing the impeachings doesn't look like the drawings they show on television. The sketches don't convey the high, high ceiling of 30 feet or more, the cascade of olive green velvet curtains that shrink two low tiers of congressmen laboring to learn the etiquette of decapitation.

Courts ordinarily begin punctually unless they're all in back pulling a fast one *in camera*, but Peter Rodino more or less eases the Judiciary Committee into session around the stated time. On this day, when they were confronted with yet another request from Nixon to delay answering the subpoena, the chairman must use his affable egalitarian talents because some of the Democrats are getting hard to deal with. Their patience has run out and, not realizing that when you want to cook a presidential goose you let it simmer a very long time, they want to get on with the impeaching.

First, Waldie of California, a pleasant, articulate man, suggests that Nixon's lawyer, like the mouthpiece for any gangster, is seeking delay. He predicts what everybody in the room knows, but some find convenient not to say: the subpoena will not be honored, the tapes will not be delivered. How can they be made public if the rumors are true that in private Nixon has a dirty, race-slurring, minority-jeering tongue?

Liz Holtzman, the young congresswoman from Brooklyn, scoffs at the explanation that the tapes can't come over to Sam Rayburn's building because the President—they never refer to Nixon any other way—has been too busy to review all of them. Holtzman is respectful of Rodino whom she calls "my chairman," but points out in soft but clear language that her President has had time to frolic in Key Biscayne, talk to fawning business men in Chicago and play with his yo-yo in Nashville.

The reason for cooling it is explained to the red hots

and the public at large by Barbara Jordan, the first-term congresswoman who has impressed so many people here. "It's been our practice to give the President due process and due process quadruple to demonstrate to the rest of the world that we are not out to kill the King."

Which is, of course, exactly what they are out to do, but this is one *corrida* where, when the bull is dispatched not only the matador but the picadors and the whole committee must be awarded both ears, the tail and a grateful sigh of relief. So a chap from Utah (impeachings require participation from the most unlikely places) a man named Owens said he's going along with his chairman too.

Their next order of business was to get a status report from their staff. John Doar, their chief counsel, told them in effect that he's winnowed down the allegations against Nixon to the basic 500 charges for which there is a damning amount of evidence. Father Robert Drinan, the only Jesuit sitting in the House of Representatives, was bothered by the notion that Nixon might not be impeached for bombing Cambodia, but there is such an embarrassment of riches that if Nixon were to be convicted of everything he is probably guilty of, it would look like he was being framed. A bipartisan consensus seems to be forming that it is better to dispatch him for baser, more easily understood crimes. Thus it may be that the technical charge resulting in our first presidential expulsion may not be war or Watergate, but ripping off the government in remodeling the den in San Clemente.

In all of this the Republicans, who appear much dumber than their opposite number, may be pulling the Democrats into a trap. Sitting in the Judiciary Committee room watching the congressmen lean forward at their desks to take the swivelled microphones and speak, the observer is startled by the thought that a number of these people lapse into periods of honesty when they put what they calculate to be the general before their own or that of their party.

That's fine for the Republicans who would be happy to sleep through 10 disastrous years of Jerry Ford in the White House; but the Democrats must slow down the impeachings. Right now impeachment is the only plank in their platform. To impeach the President is like a man feeding his furnace by filling it with the shingles off his roof.

The only slogan the Democrats have is, We Are The Party Without Nixon. They are the plus of his minus, the positive of his negative; so that when he goes they go. Without Nixon, the Democrats will have to fight inflation.