

Wide House Probe Likely Into Justice Department

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When the House Judiciary Committee meets today it is expected to approve a sweeping investigation of the Justice Department and "the climate that allowed Watergate."

The investigation will mark a change in the committee's attitude since the days when Rep. Emanuel Celler (D-N.Y.) was chairman and the committee had what was described as a cozy relationship with the department it was supposed to oversee. In the days of Celler, who was defeated in the last election, what overseeing was done of the Justice Department was done by the appropriations subcommittee on the judiciary.

But while the decision to investigate the Justice Department represents a marked difference in the committee, it amounts to a compromise with more liberal members who wanted a wholesale reorganization of the committee itself.

Celler had resisted giving fixed jurisdictions to subcommittees. In fact, they had no real names, only numbers—Subcommittee No. 1, Subcommittee No. 2, and so on. This allowed chairman Celler to direct most of the important matters to his subcommittee, No. 5, so that his was jammed with work

while others had only minor matter to handle. One subcommittee handled claims, another immigration and naturalization, a third trademarks, copyrights and patents, and the like.

Thus, an investigation of crime went not to the Judiciary Committee at all, but to a select committee headed by Rep. Claude Pepper (D-Fla.). Such categories as constitutional amendments, because of the blurring of subcommittee jurisdictions, were handed out at Celler's discretion, thereby consolidating his hold and power over the committee.

At the beginning of this Congress when Rep. Peter Rodino (D-N.J.) took over as chairman, liberal Democratic members complained about the way the committee was organized and the lack of overseeing it performed.

Rodino agreed to appoint an ad hoc subcommittee headed by Rep. Robert W. Kastenmeier (D-Wis.) to look into the reorganization matter and suggest changes. Freshmen Democrats, Wayne Ownes of Utah, Barbara Jordan of Texas and Elizabeth Holtzman of New York; along with third-term James R.

Mann of South Carolina also were appointed. Since it was a creature of the committee's Democratic caucus, no Republicans were appointed, but three Republicans were invited to sit in.

The ad hoc subcommittee came back with a report which suggested sweeping changes, including fixed jurisdictions for each subcommittee and allowing subcommittee chairmen and members to "reselect" subcommittees based on the new plan. It also called for vigorous investigations of overseeing activities.

Kastenmeier's reorganization plan would have taken effect immediately, and the subcommittees now in existence would have finished up their business at the same time the new subcommittees went into operation.

Senior Democrats on the committee objected that this would involve 14 subcommittees operating at the same time, and that such a reorganization would be unwieldy in the middle of a Congress.

And Chairman Rodino, sources said, began to realize that he was giving up his discretionary power to assign subjects to subcommittees, thereby lessening his power.