

# Impeach Nixon Effort Floundering

By Jack Anderson

Although each new Watergate twist tightens the vise on President Nixon, the inquiry into his impeachment is floundering.

The doors have been shut tight on the House Judiciary Committee's investigation. Only staff members are permitted to enter the offices, and no papers may be removed. Attorneys and investigators have been given strict orders not to discuss their work with the press.

What the staff is really hiding behind the guarded doors, however, is their own inaction and lack of direction. Here are the facts which we have been able to dig out:

• House Judiciary Chairman Peter Rodino (D-N.J.) has assured House Republican Leader John Rhodes privately that the impeachment inquiry should be concluded in April. Those close to the investigation don't see how they possibly can meet the deadline.

At this writing, not a single witness against the President has been interviewed directly by the committee's investigators. Instead, they have spent their time studying the work of other investigators.

The White House has not been approached, even informally, to provide any information which might help to speed the inquiry. Staff members haven't even been allowed to request personnel lists or telephone numbers from the White House.

• Although documents related to the President's personal finances were available to committee sleuths from other sources, the information was not accepted because the committee "was not ready for them yet."

• Although chief counsel John Doar has a staff of about 40 under his command, more than half have been assigned merely to answer the routine impeachment mail that has been flooding into the committee's office.

• Instead of turning up evidence that would justify impeachment the committee is concentrating its efforts on researching what offenses might constitute grounds for impeachment.

• In an interview with us, Doar placed great stress on setting up a secure and elaborate filing system. The problem at the moment is that nothing of significance has been collected for those well-organized file

drawers.

• Staff members have been warned in strong terms that they will be summarily fired if they are caught talking with reporters. This injunction has worked fairly well, since the committee hasn't turned up anything newsworthy and most aides are reluctant to admit the probe's shortcomings.

Chairman Rodino told us he is more interested in making history than headlines. The removal of a sitting President, Rodino said, can be justified only by the most careful and thorough investigation.

The evidence is now being assembled by the staff, which will carefully piece it together, he said.

He wants to have his case ready, he said, before he asks the House for subpoena power. The committee's constitutional experts say the White House cannot claim executive privilege as an excuse for withholding evidence from an impeachment inquiry. Any refusal by the White House to honor a subpoena would, itself, be grounds for impeachment, they believe.

Our committee sources have told us the staff hasn't completed enough background

work to issue subpoenas or to begin its proceedings. But Chairman Rodino assured us he is more committed to a thorough investigation than an April deadline.

**Persona Non Grata**—Robert Chenoweth returned home last March after spending five years in North Vietnamese prisons. He tried to go back to South Vietnam a few days ago. The Saigon government, for which he had risked his life, wouldn't let him into the country.

He was one of the eight ex-POWs accused by Air Force Col. Theodore Guy of "collaborating" with the enemy. The Pentagon, however, refused to press charges.

Chenoweth wanted to go back to Saigon, he told us, to compare "the differences between South Vietnamese prisons and North Vietnamese prisons."

When Chenoweth stopped at the Vietnamese consulate in San Francisco to pick up his visa, it was stamped "void." He had been denied entry into the country, he was told, because of his "pro-Communist activities"—a euphemism used by the South Vietnamese to describe anyone who opposes the Thieu regime.

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