

Rodino Unit Firm on Tapes But Bars Early Showdown

By BILL KOVACH

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WASHINGTON, March 13—The House Judiciary Committee moved today to avoid an early confrontation with the White House over evidence requested for the impeach-

ment inquiry, but insisted that President Nixon must comply with the committee's requests.

At a news conference called by the committee chairman, Peter W. Rodino Jr., New Jersey Democrat, to respond to a flurry of critical remarks by White House spokesmen, about the committee's inquiry, Mr. Rodino said:

"We expect and will continue to expect full cooperation from all persons."

The news conference came after a private caucus of angry Democrats at which they were urged not to be goaded into hasty or careless action as a result of White House remarks comparing them to undisciplined children.

Struggle Over Tapes

The caucus and news conference were called after two days of news articles generated by the White House that implied that the President would furnish no more evidence to the House inquiry, accused the committee of engaging in a "fishing expedition" and compared its members to "a lot of children" who want second helpings at meal time before they have cleaned their plates.

Central to the dispute is a committee request for tapes of some 40 Presidential conversations before and after March 21 when President Nixon insists he first learned of the Watergate cover-up. The White House has refused to respond to the request since Feb. 25.

Although members of both parties agreed today that it would be wise to avoid a confrontation, they agreed that nearly unanimous support existed on the committee to issue a subpoena to try to force the President to comply if the evidence was refused.

Speaking of the sentiment in the Democratic caucus, Representative Robert F. Drinan, Democrat of Massachusetts,

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told newsmen, "There is an overwhelming consensus that we'll have to subpoena the material at some time—it's just a matter of time."

However, he added, the committee members had been persuaded by senior counsel to the inquiry, John M. Doar, that it would be wiser to "build our case carefully — get all our ducks in a row — before moving further and avoid forcing a showdown on the wrong issue at the wrong time."

"Not Rushing In"

Representative Jerome R. Waldie, California Democrat, agreed and added, "We are not drawing back from confrontation. We are moving strongly and firmly ahead—we're just not rushing in."

Representative Edward Hutchinson of Michigan, the committee's ranking Republican member, reinforced the Democrats' determination to receive the evidence.

"What we have asked for is very reasonable and very relevant," Mr. Hutchinson said. "It is necessary to the inquiry. There would be no inquiry if there were no suspicion about the President's actions in connection with the so-called 'Watergate cover-up.'"

In the news conference, Mr. Rodino and Mr. Hutchinson, supported by Mr. Doar and Albert E. Jenner Jr., senior Republican counsel to the inquiry, resorted to a number of arguments raised by the White House.

To the charge that the committee's request was a "fishing expedition," both Mr. Doar and Mr. Jenner retorted that the President's lawyer, James D. St. Clair, knew better.

"We spent two and one half hours with him on Monday, going over in detail specifically what we wanted and why. There is no misunderstanding on his part of what the committee's request is," Mr. Jenner said.

Mr. Doar and Mr. Jenner agreed that there "is no question" Mr. St. Clair had enough information to give the committee a yes or no answer on whether the material will be provided.

They indicated that much of

the fault was with the White House records system. Despite a year of inquiry into the activities of President Nixon and his top aides, they said today, the White House has no index of papers and documents in its possession.

Proposal to St. Clair

Mr. Doar said: "To determine what information in those files is relevant and necessary to this inquiry we have suggested to Mr. St. Clair that we work out a way, in the absence of an index, to examine the material."

Mr. Rodino indicated that on the basis of this request by the committee the White House had charged that the committee wants to "back a truck up to the White House and haul away papers." He branded that characterization "inaccurate."

In the closed caucus, according to members present, committee counsel told members that the negotiations were "between counsel for the committee and counsel for the President" and not other White House spokesmen.

Senior members of the committee also rejected the possibility of a third-person compromise, raised today by a Republican Senator, Norris Cotton of New Hampshire.

Senator Cotton's suggestion, similar to one made earlier by President Nixon, was for some "independent person" to examine White House documents to determine what was relevant to the committee inquiry.

Both Mr. Hutchinson and Mr. Rodino rejected such an offer and said the House was charged with the responsibility for impeachment "and it cannot be discharged by some outside party."