

Rodino Panel Leaks Reached

By William Chapman
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One day last week one of those mysterious House Judiciary Committee "sources" who routinely has doled out tidbits of confidential information had some bad news for the reporters who gathered daily in his office.

"I've decided," he said, "that I just can't help you anymore."

He explained that the news leaks on the committee's impeachment inquiry had become so numerous and had been so prominently played in the press that the work of the committee had been endangered.

Another congressman usually willing to feed partisan items to the hungry press summoned a reporter to his

office and expressed deep concern that the reporter's newspaper was preparing to print 14 confidential committee memos. "That will just about blow this whole thing out of the water," he said.

From the start, news leaks—most of them inspired by partisan motives—have been the keys to understanding what the Judiciary Committee is doing behind its closed doors. Many have been inaccurate and misleading. On one day, two prominent newspapers reported precisely opposite accounts of whether President Nixon had been linked to a payoff in the milk fund inquiry.

But last week, the leaks became a flood and even the

leakers were getting nervous. Some members vowed to cut it out with the same grim determination that heavy drinkers display in promising to abandon the bottle. "I think we're a little embarrassed by what we've done," said one member.

It was not so much contribution as a fear among committee Democrats that leaks were turning into political liabilities. They fit the Nixon administration's portrayal of a partisan committee trying to sway the public toward impeachment before all the evidence was in. Such administration supporters as House Minority Leader John J. Rhodes (R-Ariz.) warned that closed hearings would "degenerate

Flood Level, Then Abated

into a campaign of smear, innuendo and half-truth."

"They (the leaks) were beginning to make us all vulnerable," said Rep. Edward Mezvinsky (D-Iowa). The Republican strategy against the impeachment inquiry, he said, always had been "the three D's—delay, divide and discredit." Leaks were undermining the committee's credibility to the point that "it hurts the committee more than it does the President," Mezvinsky said.

The first stream of leaks last week reported that the committee had information that, despite his denials, Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger had a hand in initiating wiretaps on officials and newsmen. Kissinger's threat to resign was laid at the Judiciary Committee's doorstep by administration sympathizers.

A previously obscure member of the committee, Rep. Joshua Eilberg (D-Pa.), one of the first to disclose the wiretap issue, was elevated to public ogre by White House counsel Dean Burch who charged the Kissinger affair was a case of "Eilbergism."

By the end of the week, Eilberg was saying to reporters, "Nothing more is going to come out of this office."

But the most divisive leaks were those of three memoranda containing com-

mittee evidence that had been prepared by a Judiciary Committee staff member, William P. Dixon. One of them reported that President Nixon had urged former Attorney General John N. Mitchell to "stonewall it" and to plead the Fifth Amendment if called to testify.

The Dixon memos provoked special antagonism within the committee because they clearly bore a Democratic stamp.

The origin of those memos was a decision several weeks ago among a handful of Democrats that the evidence against Mr. Nixon had to be spelled out more specifically. They had concluded that the huge volume of papers, memos, and transcripts dispassionately present by Chief Counsel John Boer was both confusing and deliberately nonpartisan. They asked for, and received, special staff help and Dixon set to work arranging certain pieces of evidence in a form that suggested Mr. Nixon's guilt in abetting the Watergate cover-up.

The memos at first were made available only to a few select Democrats and never to Republicans on the committee. When they (memos) were leaked, GOP members exclaimed that their worst fears were realized—that the committee staff was being used to pre-

pare and distribute partisan, pro-impeachment information.

Some sources said Dixon had prepared a total of 14 memos dealing with various phases of the impeachment deniability established when the committee began its inquiry and all of them targeted specifically on the President's involvement. One of them reportedly cites what some members contend is the President's use of ethnic slurs during conversations with aides.

The Dixon memos irritated Judiciary Committee Chairman Peter W. Rodino Jr. (D-N.J.) who twice last week admonished members to heed the rules of confidentiality established when the committee began its work.

And, Rodino declared, there would be no more Dixon memos.

The committee intends to hold at least one more week of closed sessions that will include presentation of evidence on the firing by President Nixon in last fall of then Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox.

Rodino told newsmen Friday will be delayed because the House floor. That may of the committee, Rodino said.