

Joseph Alsop

Will Mr. Nixon Resign?

It begins to seem more and more possible that President Nixon will resign. There will soon be a Republican Vice President to step into the President's shoes; and the forces pushing him toward resignation are growing stronger and stronger.

Some days ago, for instance, he received his staff's hair-raising report on the situation in the House Judiciary Committee. When the committee first began consideration of a bill of impeachment, a number of the senior House Democrats tried hard to arrange brief hearings and an early vote by the House as a whole. This would have favored the President greatly. But Bryce Harlow and the lesser White House staff members could offer no hope of such a result.

Instead, they predicted investigations and hearings by the House Judiciary Committee spun out for nearly a year, *until next October!* There were good reasons for this forecast, too, beginning with the character and situation of the chairman of the House Committee, Representative Peter Rodino of New Jersey.

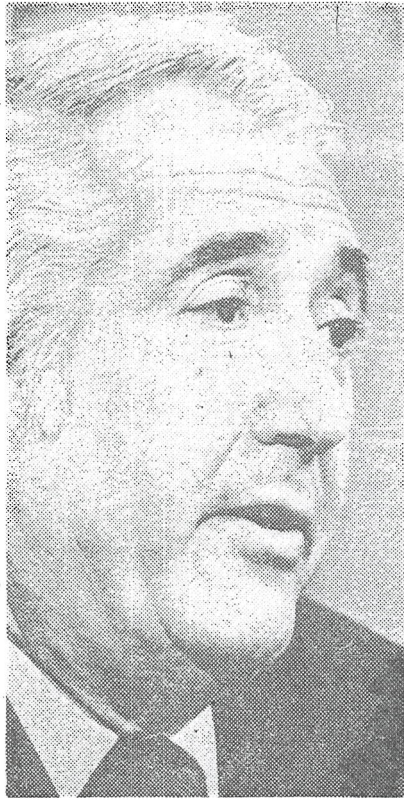
Rodino is a weak man with little experience as chairman, and he has no real authority. Of the 20 other Democrats on the committee, no less than 16 belong to the leftwing of the party. Under the new House rules, they can vote Rodino out of the chairmanship if they choose. In addition, Rodino comes from a former Italian district now largely turned black; and he will be in danger at the next election against any serious black candidate who also has solid support from organized labor.

It can be seen, then, that Rodino has got to listen to his committee's 16 left-wingers, as he has to listen to George Meany of the AFL-CIO, who has said he wants impeachment. The House has also voted the funds for elaborate investigation and long hearings by the committee.

The committee's left-wingers believe—almost certainly correctly—that long hearings will give them a better chance of getting a favorable committee report and a vote for a bill of impeachment in the House itself. Hence they want all the Watergate horrors to be aired at maximum length. Thus the President had to be given the dreadful news that he could not count on final action by the committee in less than 11 months!

Furthermore, he had to be told he could not count, in any absolute way, on the slender majority composed of the committee's 16 Republicans and four moderate-to-conservative Democrats. Four of the Republicans are novices elected by slender majorities, for example. The long distant outcome will therefore depend on the way that public opinion moves through the months ahead. The swing of public opinion could even produce a majority for impeachment in the House itself, where there is nothing like a majority today.

Such was the final message to the



President on the outlook on Capitol Hill at the moment. The emphasis placed on the swing of opinion in the country was obviously no surprise to him. He had perceived the crucial importance of the trend of opinion long before receiving his staff's analysis of the line-up within the House Judiciary Committee. That was why he launched his "counterattack."

There is a great deal of argument in this rancid political city about the real trend of opinion at the grass roots. Some members of the House and Senate report that their mail has turned rather abruptly in the President's favor. Yet the last Gallup Poll showed an increase in those favoring the President's impeachment, to 37 per cent,

while the Harris Poll showed 41 per cent hoping he would resign.

If the polls move sharply in the other direction, the Congress will follow the polls—for such is the nature of that honorable group of patriots. Meanwhile, however, the President has to give further consideration to the resentment sure to be engendered by the energy crisis, and to the likelihood that this resentment will be further inflamed by an economic slump. Add to this the fact that the Senate will take an eternity to consider the matter if the House ends by sending over a bill of impeachment. You can then see the main forces acting on the President today.

There are only two counter-forces. Some are telling the President, quite possibly correctly, that no one else will have the guts to deal adequately with the terrible crises overseas that now loom up ahead. No one is telling him, by the same token, that the Senate is really likely to muster the two-thirds majority needed for actual impeachment.

But the real question is whether the President will wish to put the country through two more years, or even longer, of the same kind of wringer the country is in today. It seems more and more possible he will not wish to do so, simply because he is a genuinely patriotic man.

© 1973, Los Angeles Times

“Rep. Rodino (left) has to listen to George Meany of AFL-CIO, who has said he wants impeachment.”

