

House Judiciary Chief

Peter Wallace Rodino Jr.



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A poetry-writing, opera-loving, skilled politician
(Mr. Rodino, right, with Speaker Carl Albert)

By MARTIN TOLCHIN

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 23—

With his wavy silver hair and dark pin-striped suits, he looks the very model of a Congressman, pure Washington, but his voice is the voice of the streets, tough and raspy, pure Newark. These are the two worlds of Peter Wallace Rodino Jr., chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, which has jurisdiction over the two most compelling issues confronting official Washington: exploration of possible impeachment proceedings against President Nixon, and investigation of the fitness of Mr. Nixon's nominee for Vice President, Gerald R. Ford.

Man
in the
News

"I lie awake at nights," Mr. Rodino said in an interview today, assessing his new responsibilities. "It's awesome. I just hope I'll be able to live up to them."

He is a man of paradoxes, a cultured man who writes poems, plays and even attempted a novel, a theatre-goer and opera lover, but a man who is part of one of the nation's most entrenched political machines—the Essex County Democratic organization.

He is a man who has been persistently linked to members of organized crime, and who just as persistently has denied these ties. His name appears on the celebrated tape recordings made by law enforcement officers between 1961-1963 of the telephone conversations of the late Angelo (Gyp) DeCarlo, a convicted extortionist.

Double-Cross Alleged

"Carey double-crossed me," DeCarlo said of the late Dennis Carey, who was then the Essex County Democratic leader. "We gave him plenty of money, but we didn't get one thing from him. A lot of it was Tony Boy's money. He never produced one thing. The only favors we ever got were off Hughie [Addonizio] and Rodino."

"Any favors we ever went to them for, we got right away," Mr. DeCarlo said, in the tapes made public by a Federal judge.

Mr. Rodino is familiar with the charge. "I lived in the First Ward of Newark," he recalled today. "There were a lot of people who came from that area, people with backgrounds who participated in one thing or another, who knew me as a young man."

As for DeCarlo, "If I ever met him, I wouldn't know him."

Herbert Stern, United States Attorney for New Jersey, asked about the DeCarlo tapes, said, "Today, in my opinion, Rodino is an honest man, and a fine public servant."

"They threw a lot of names around," Mr. Stern continued, "and frequently boasted of connections which they never had."

Born in Newark

Mr. Rodino has always represented at least a part of Newark, where he was born in a tenement and now lives in a 10-room frame house. When the state was redistricted last year, Mr. Rodino had the option of representing all of Newark, or running against his former roommate, Representative Joseph G. Minish, to represent the suburbs.

He chose Newark, on a temporary basis, and has since spent some of his political energies in an effort to get redistricted back into the suburbs. In the Newark district, 52 per cent black and 10 per cent Spanish speaking, Mr. Rodino was immediately challenged by William S. Hart, the black Mayor of East Orange, for what came to be regarded as a black seat. A second black candidate, Assemblyman George C. Richardson, entered the race amid charges that he was the organization's candidate to split the black vote.

Mr. Rodino won a clear majority, sweeping the Italian-American North Ward and breaking even in the black areas.

In his 25 years in the House, he is proudest of having written sections of the Civil Rights act, including the Fair Employment Practices Amendment, and introducing immigration reforms,

including removing national origin quotas for immigrants from the Western Hemisphere.

Mr. Rodino was born on June 7, 1909, in a tenement on "drift street," the title of an unpublished novel. His father, a skilled worker, came to the United States when he was 16 years old. His mother died when he was four years old. The Representative still remembers her, however. "She would tell my father, 'Look after him, he's going to amount to something.'"