

Impeachment Unit's Head Does Not Bask in Status

By MARTIN TOLCHIN

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 16—"Pete, you're a celebrity," Brendan T. Byrne, then New Jersey's Governor-elect, called across a cut-glass shrimp bowl last week at a cocktail reception at Mayfair Farms in West Orange, N. J., at a gathering of the state's politicians. "You get your picture on television and in Time magazine."

"You're the third most important man in America, said John Renna, executive director of the New Jersey Housing Finance Agency. "You may be President."

The object of their adulation was Representative Peter W. Rodino, the diminutive, 64-year-old chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, which is exploring the possible impeachment of President Nixon. Mr. Rodino did not bask in his new celebrity status. He shrugged, smiled sheepishly, and seemed vaguely embarrassed by all the attention.

His new status has, however, eased some of his political problems. His heightened prestige and increased patronage make it highly unlikely that Mr. Rodino will be challenged for re-election by a major black candidate, although Mr. Ro-

dino's 10th District in Newark is 52 per cent black and was created to provide black representation in Congress.

"I think that local politicians in general are kind of proud of his activities in Washington," said State Senator Wynoma Lipman of Newark, the first black woman in the State Senate. "You can hardly hear any criticism of the way Rodino is conducting himself in Washington or at home in these parts."

'An Honest Man'

Herbert J. Stern, United States Attorney for New Jersey and a nominee for a Federal District judgeship, praised Mr. Rodino as "an honest man and a fine public servant."

"He gets better all the time," said Mort Pye, editor of Newark's Star-Ledger. "He'll be tougher even without redistricting." But prospects for redistricting are looking up, now that the state has a Democratic Governor and a Democratic-controlled legislature. Mr. Rodino would

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Peter W. Rodino Jr., chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, greeting constituents in a Newark supermarket

The New York Times/Edward Hausner

like to get back his old district—the white ethnic North and East Wards, and some of the suburbs.

His new role in Congress also has endowed him with a respectability that had eluded him in some quarters. Now members in good standing of the liberal establishment come to pay court.

But he has less time to meet his constituents, although he pledged last December, at a breakfast meeting with 200 North Ward residents at Biase's Restaurant on Bloomfield Avenue in Newark, that he would always be available in emergencies.

Mr. Rodino is clearly not a street person. He seems more at home in the halls of Congress than on the streets of his district, and gets little exhilaration from the laying on of hands. In fact, he attended the cocktail reception and walked the streets of Newark one day last week mostly to satisfy the news media, which has generally ignored him during his 25 years in Congress. During the month-long Christmas recess, these were his only public appearances in New Jersey.

Courtly Approach

On the streets of Newark, in the North and East Wards, and the predominantly black Central and South wards, Mr. Rodino greeted constituents with a courtly shyness. "May I say hello?" he asked, tentatively. "I'm Congressman Rodino." Then he slowly led up to what really interested him.

"What do you think of the gas shortage?" he asked. "What do you think of the high prices? Finally, what do you think of the inquiry we're conducting into the conduct of the President of the United States?"

Almost everyone had heard of the inquiry, and almost everyone wanted Mr. Nixon out of office, although the white ethnic constituents generally stressed that Mr. Nixon should be removed but not humiliated.

"I would say that the North Ward wouldn't give a damn if Nixon got impeached, but they're not going to go out and work for it," said Stephen Adubato, the ward's Democratic chairman and director of the North Ward Educational Center. "They couldn't care less. They would appreciate his removal without a lot of fuss."

The North Ward, where Mr. Rodino lives with his wife in a 10-room frame house gave Mr. Nixon a comfortable majority in 1972.

Mr. Adubato reflected the pride taken in Mr. Rodino by Newark's Italian-American community.

"Pete ranks with Columbus," Mr. Adubato said. "Congressman Rodino is in the most important position any Italian has been in since Columbus. The Jews have a million heroes. Give us one."

Gibson's View

Kenneth Gibson, Newark's black Mayor, who with Mr. Rodino, Mr. Byrne and their wives attended a recent Metropolitan Opera performance of "La Traviata," agreed that "Pete is important to Newark."

here," Mr. Gibson said. "I don't think he'll have any problem surviving."

David H. Barrett, an associate of Imamu Baraka, the former Leroi Jones, and a leader of the Committee for a Unified Newark, said of Mr. Rodino: "He seems to be making a lot of politically correct decisions. He's holding his own."

"Now we're delighted with him," Mr. Hemenway said. "We think he's doing quite well."

Liberal Record

Actually, Mr. Rodino does have a liberal voting record. He has voted for the use of Federal funds to bus children to achieve racial balance, against the Cambodian bombing and against permitting voluntary prayer in public schools.

Despite its influential Congressman, however, Newark still has its blight spreading up Springfield Avenue. The inner city has been compared to Berlin after the war, with burnt out, boarded apartment buildings, two-family homes and stores. The district received \$522-million in Federal funds last year, 2-million less than was received by the 11th District, its more prosperous neighbor to the north, and \$1million less than was received by the ninth district, which consists of half of Bergen County.

Asked to explain why impoverished Newark did worse than its more affluent neighbors, Mr. Rodino replied that he was not familiar with the figures.

One critic of Mr. Rodino is Anthony Imperiale, who announced today his candidacy for Newark's mayoralty. A conservative independent, he was elected last fall to both the State Senate and Assembly, and he chose the Senate.

"Pete is putting his neck out, and they're going to chop it off," said Mr. Imperiale.

He criticized Mr. Rodino for staying aloof from the struggle involving Kawaida Towers, a low-income housing project to be built in the heart of the North Ward. The project was supported by Imamu Baraka and opposed by Mr. Imperiale and many residents of the North Ward.

"It was really a state matter," Mr. Rodino explained.

On Street Tour

Mr. Imperiale also criticized Mr. Rodino's vote against the confirmation of Vice President Gerald R. Ford and said of the impeachment proceedings, "We should be very delicate about how we do things in the United States, and not put our dirty linen in the window for everyone to see."

Finally, Mr. Imperiale said, "Pete should spend more time on the streets. You get a better understanding of people."

Mr. Rodino took to the streets one morning last week, hatless in the 25-degree cold, his hands in the pockets of a black topcoat. He began in the Portuguese-Polish East Ward, at an insurance agency whose owner had been a campaign aide.

"What do they say about impeachment?" Mr. Rodino asked Finney Alati, owner of the company.

"They're in favor of it," Alati replied, "but they

don't want to hurt the country."

"Do they think impeachment means he's guilty?" Mr. Rodino asked. Mr. Alati shrugged his shoulders.

"The general mood of the people is that they're sick of Nixon," Manuel Geraldo volunteered.

Mr. Rodino then walked two blocks down Lafayette Street to a Pantry Pride supermarket and was greeted by an announcement on the public address system: "We have an honored guest with us this morning."

"What do you think about the impeachment process?" Mr. Rodino asked a middle-aged woman waiting at the checkout counter. "I don't think too much about that," she replied.

Walt McDonald, the dairy manager, asked Mr. Rodino, "What's going on with the gasoline situation and what are you doing about it?"

"We're trying to find out if there is a real shortage," replied Mr. Rodino, who also happens to be chairman of the Antitrust Subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee, which could investigate allegations of collusion and price-rigging on the part of the oil industry.

In Olshin's Pharmacy, next

door, Mr. Rodino asked a customer about impeachment.

"No comment," the man replied. "I don't know what to say."

At a Pathmark supermarket in the Wequahic section, which is predominantly black, Herman Jackson, who works in a liquor store, told Mr. Rodino, "I don't know how poor people are going to make it; things are getting out of hand."

Another man asked, "What gave you the guts to go against the President?" A third inquired, "Why is it taking so long?"

What did Mr. Rodino conclude from the walking tour?

"People have a lot on their minds," he said. "They don't seem to believe what's happening — whether the shortage of gas has been phoned up — and all the other shortages."

"Many of them have lost confidence in government and government officials," he continued.

On the issue of impeachment, Mr. Rodino said that "some want it done immediately, and others have awe for the Presidency."

"But as you can see," he concluded, "there isn't any enthusiasm anywhere for the Administration."