

Impeachment Case Is Standing Still



Jack Anderson

ALTHOUGH each new Watergate twist tightens the vise on President Nixon, the inquiry into his impeachment is floundering.

The doors have been shut tight on the House Judiciary Committee's investigation. Only staff members are permitted to enter the offices and no papers may be removed. Attorneys and investigators have been given strict orders not to discuss their work with the press.

What the staff is really hiding behind the guarded doors, however, is their own inaction and lack of direction. Here are the facts which we have been able to dig out:

- House Judiciary Chairman Peter Rodino (Dem.-N.J.), has assured House Republican leader John Rhodes privately that the impeachment inquiry should be concluded in April. Those close to the investigation don't see how they possibly can meet the deadline.

- At this writing, not a single witness against the President has been interviewed directly by the committee's investigators. Instead, they have spent their time studying the work of other investigations.

- The White House has not been approached, even informally, to provide any information which might help to speed the inquiry. Staff members haven't even been allowed to request personnel lists or tele-

phone numbers from the White House.

- Although documents related to the President's personal finances were available to committee sleuths from other sources, the information was not accepted because the committee "was not ready for them yet."

- Some of the investigators, because of administrative problems, spend much of their time reading newspapers and novels. Although they are supposed to coordinate their work, some staff members actually haven't met each other. At 5 p.m., there is a rush for the exits.

- Instead of turning up evidence that would justify impeachment, the committee is concentrating its efforts on researching what offenses might constitute grounds for impeachment.

- In an interview with us, Chief counsel John Doar placed great stress on setting up a secure and elaborate filing system. The problem at the moment is that nothing of significance has been collected for those well organized file drawers.

- Staff members have been warned in strong terms that they will be summarily fired if they are caught talking with reporters. This injunction has worked fairly well, since the committee hasn't turned up anything newsworthy and most aides are reluctant to admit the probe's shortcomings.