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Brennan Asks Poll on Impeaching

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Secretary of Labor Peter J. Brennan suggested a poll of the AFL-CIO membership yesterday as "the only fair way" to determine whether the rank-and-file supports the labor organization's demand for the impeachment of President Nixon.

Brennan told newsmen that unionists he has met around the country are divided over the impeachment issue and that "even those who have gone along with the leadership on this are not really hot for impeachment."

"A lot of people I have met in the labor movement around the country feel they weren't asked about the stand that was taken, and some are indignant," Brennan declared.

"I'm a member of the AFL-CIO, AND I wasn't asked."

Brennan said that President Nixon told him in a meeting last Thursday that he had no intention of resigning and "he felt he would not be impeached." Mr. Nixon volunteered this in the course of a discussion of Labor Department plans, the Secretary added.

The President is benefiting from "an habitual American way of reacting in favor of the underdog," Brennan observed. "You know how the American people are. They can be against you, and then if everyone's against you, they change."

Mr. Nixon should not resign, Brennan contended, because "most Americans are more concerned about the cost of living and the energy crisis than Watergate. They feel Watergate has gone beyond what it means, and that politicians all play the game."

If the President is impeached, he added, "he should fight it out."

At one point, the Secretary stressed that Watergate "should be left to the Congress and the courts."

Later, he commented that "nobody wants to be indicted, and an indictment and trial could be rough on the country. I would like to see this resolved, but not through impeaching or indicting. Perhaps there is some other way of clearing this."

Bristling at a question concerning the recent appointment of Federal Mediation Service director W.J. Usery as a special White House adviser on labor problems arising from the energy shortage, Brennan said, "I am the No. 1 labor adviser to the President. All of these problems come to me, but we are certainly glad to have Bill Usery stay on."

Usery's White House appointment coincided with his decision to remain in the mediation post rather than make an expected move to a new job as the third ranking official in the AFL-CIO hierarchy. Asked whether the White House appointment might have been motivated by a desire to "keep him from Meany," Brennan replied, "I'm sure it was."

The Labor Department reported yesterday that major collective bargaining settlements concluded during 1973 provided for smaller wage increases than agreements reached in 1972, continuing a downward trend evident since 1970.

Wage adjustments during the first year of the contract averaged 5.8 per cent, down from a 7.3 per cent average gain for 1972.