



Complex Causes For That Subpoena

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EXTREMELY complex, hardly understood causes led to the famous subpoena addressed by the House Judiciary Committee to the White House last Thursday. These are also causes that it is worth trying to see in proportion, since they explain much that is mysterious.

To begin with, the President's lawyer, James D. St. Clair, has been a man in the middle since he took the job. Lawyer St. Clair has thoroughly understood the frantic warnings of the House and Senate minority leaders, representative John Rhodes and Senator Hugh Scott, that seeming-concealment would greatly increase the chances of President Nixon's impeachment.

Mr. Nixon, however, has been an exceedingly difficult client. He has a high notion of his office's prerogatives. In large measure, he has also been trying to be his own lawyer — and there is an old legal saying that "any man who decides to be his own lawyer has a fool for a client."

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IN SUM, lawyer St. Clair has been caught between the president pulling him one way, and political necessity and the House Judiciary Committee jointly hauling him the other way. By the same token, moreover, the special counsel of the House Judiciary Committee, John Doar, has also been a man in the middle.

Counsel Doar has wanted from the first to discharge his unprecedented responsibility carefully, judicially, above all,

non-politically. Both Lawyer St. Clair and the White House chief of staff, General Alexander Haig, are quite open in their praise of the Doar approach. In that approach, counsel Doar has also been able to carry with him, at least in the main, the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Representative Peter Rodino.

Yet Chairman Rodino has a lot of Democratic committee members on his hands who want an impeachment vote, no matter what.

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IN THE LIGHT of all these internal pullings and haulings in the committee, the subpoena issued last Thursday can be seen as a compromise.

The list of charges against the president was narrowed. The subject of interest to the house committee were carefully specified in a letter from counsel Doar on April 4—a letter long delayed, of course because of the pulling and hauling. Chairman Rodino also came out in support of lawyer St. Clair's request for a watching brief throughout the committee inquiry.

The importance of all this lies in the motive of the group of committee members who actively hankered for a confrontation with the White House—but have probably got no more than a fake confrontation.

Here the point is simple. If many house members end with the feeling that the president has obstinately concealed relevant evidence, the members will naturally conclude he has a lot to conceal.