

Judiciary Panel Clears Role for St. Clair At Impeachment Talks, Set for Next Week

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WASHINGTON — The House Judiciary Committee agreed on how President Nixon's lawyer will be allowed to take part in the committee's impeachment hearings, due to begin next week.

There were some close votes yesterday but little of the sharp partisanship of late Wednesday night, when the panel voted 20 to 18 to advise the President he had failed to comply with its subpoena for tapes of 42 Watergate conversations. (Only one Republican joined 19 Democrats in voting for that motion, while only two Democrats, who wanted a tougher response, joined 16 Republicans in opposing it.)

It thus seems premature to say the committee has been forever split along party lines by Mr. Nixon's action in providing edited transcripts of 31 of the 42 subpoenaed conversations rather than the tapes, themselves.

The committee agreed to invite the President's counsel, James St. Clair, to "attend and observe" the impeachment staff's initial presentation of the case, which Chairman Peter Rodino (D., N.J.) said would begin late next week. Mr. St. Clair will receive a copy of the staff's opening statement and the supporting evidence when committee members receive them.

After the staff's opening statement, which Rep. Rodino said might take three or four days, Mr. St. Clair can respond. The committee will probably hear this opening statement in private, Rep. Rodino said, although a summary may be made public at the same time.

Next, the President's lawyer will have a chance to suggest witnesses or other evidence. If witnesses are called, Mr. St. Clair will be allowed to raise objections to testimony and question the witnesses.

"Leaning Over Backwards"

Nearly all yesterday's debate was on whether the committee was going far enough or too far in letting Mr. Nixon be represented by counsel. Some Democrats and Republicans maintained the committee was "leaning over backwards" to be fair to the President.

But Rep. George Danielson of California spoke for some of his Democratic colleagues when he charged the panel wasn't "just leaning over backwards—if we go along with this, we're going to be lying down."

Rep. Charles Rangel (D., N.Y.) warned that Mr. St. Clair might "sit here, question, object and intimidate witnesses." Rep. Eliz-

abeth Holtzman (D., N.Y.) predicted that Mr. St. Clair would turn the impeachment hearings "into a circus."

Rep. Edward Mezvinsky (D., Iowa) found it "somewhat ironic" that the committee was allowing the President's counsel to play a role in its proceedings, when the President had refused to let the committee's counsel join the chairman and ranking Republican in verifying the accuracy of the Watergate transcripts.

But Rep. Don Edwards (D., Calif.) warned that failure to allow Mr. St. Clair to play a role "would license historians to say to us: 'You extended less than due process to the President.'" And Rep. Robert Drinan (D., Mass.), a leading advocate of impeachment, cautioned against treating the President's counsel "as a second-class citizen."

Mr. Rodino promised the committee he wouldn't tolerate any obstruction by Mr. St. Clair and Rep. Robert Kastenmeier (D., Wis.) said that if Mr. St. Clair violated the committee's rules of procedure, "he could forfeit his right to be here."

Radio, TV Coverage

The committee voted to allow radio and television coverage of any public hearings, unless the panel votes to exclude television from a particular hearing. After the staff's opening statement of three or four days, it's anticipated the staff will make a more detailed presentation of the evidence, which could last as long as several weeks. Only then would witnesses be called.

While Chairman Rodino said he expected the committee would vote to hear the staff's opening statement in private, there wasn't any indication how much, if any, of the subsequent hearings would be closed to the public.

Meanwhile, federal Judge John Sirica scheduled for next Wednesday a full hearing on the White House's motion to quash the subpoena by the Special Watergate Prosecutor to get more presidential tapes and documents. In an abbreviated court session yesterday, Judge Sirica ordered Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski and the seven defendants in the Watergate coverup case to file their responses to the White House motion by Monday afternoon.

At about the same time, Alexander Haig, White House chief of staff, appeared before Senate Watergate committee investigators, but refused to answer any questions on order from President Nixon. Mr. Haig showed the committee a letter from the President ordering him to refrain from making any comments.