

Increasing the Odds Against Impeachment

Chairman Peter W. Rodino Jr. is sick at heart over the continuing leaks that he believes are seriously jeopardizing the standing of the House Judiciary Committee. The discipline and coherence which Rodino has sought to maintain in the impeachment inquiry have been seriously eroded.

The news leaks are manna from heaven for the White House. Presidential counsellor Dean Burch went on television the other evening to say that the inability of the committee to keep documents and confidential tapes secret is proof of the committee's unreliability.

The irony is that most of the leaking, according to committee sources, comes from three Democratic members, who are hottest for impeachment. They do not seem to realize that their response to the pressure from newsmen is putting the chance of an impeachment resolution in serious jeopardy.

The odds have been against impeachment from the start. That is the view of a staff director who has tried to keep a detached point of view in all the turmoil surrounding the work of the committee. And the odds are still against impeachment today in this carefully calculated view.

The leakers behave as though this were some relatively minor matter in-

"The inability of the Judiciary Committee to keep its documents and tapes secret is cited as proof of the committee's unreliability."

volved a federal judge instead of the most important test of law and order in the history of the nation. The newsmen press in after each secret session and the result has been a series of disclosures. The latest disclosure of two confidential memorandums supplied by committee staffers appeared in the New York Times. They were two of a total of 14 leaked after a single session.

When his aides come to him to report on the flow out of the sieve the committee is becoming, Rodino is dismayed. He has tried to be selective in distributing memorandums and staff analyses but there is little he can do with a committee made up of 38 men and women each representing his own district. The leakers are especially vulnerable to pressure from their hometown newsmen since they hope for favorable treatment in the coming election campaign.

Those trying objectively to gauge

the chance of an impeachment resolution were struck by the power of the administration in the vote on the Land use bill. By 211 to 204, the House turned down the relatively mild measure providing a degree of federal participation, without sanctions, in land use planning. Assailed by conservatives the measure as late as January had the support of Secretary of Interior Rogers Morton who gave it the administration blessing as a conservative measure.

Then the conservatives led by Rep. John J. Rhodes of Arizona, the minority leader, turned on the heat. This was an invasion of private enterprise and the right of the land owner. Orators from the White House, Morton switched. Here was impeachment politics designed to win over those who would stand by the President in the impeachment crunch.

To the troubles of the committee add the Nixon television spectacular in

the Mideast. He is on screen every night playing Mr. President on the news shows to cheering thousands. Against an exotic setting he promises peace and progress. Seen by anywhere from 30,000,000 to 40,000,000 viewers it takes no in-depth psychologist to see what coloration this lends to the President's authority.

Never mind if the substance of these exchanges is so slight as to be negligible, the scene changes every night and that is what counts. Returning from the Mideast, the President after a brief interval in Washington will go to the Soviet Union. At least a week more of television coverage will come out of that visit with Mr. President again carrying out his mission for peace in the world.

The contrast on screen with the House Judiciary Committee is daunting. Thirty-eight good men and women they appear as uncertain stragglers divided in their views. This may all be resolved when the hearings go public and the mass of material accumulated to date is given out. That will put an end to the leaks. But a great deal of damage has already been done and in arriving at the final score in the House of Representatives it cannot be discounted.