

Adrift in a sea of Nixon evidence

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WASHINGTON — If you think you're weary of Watergate and are wondering when and where and whether it will all end, consider the members of the House Judiciary Committee considering the impeachment charges.

After six weeks behind closed doors, committee members have examined 36 volumes containing more than 7,200 pages of evidence and they've listened for 12 hours to 19 taped presidential conversations.

Except for evidence the President has refused to give up, the committee staff has organized and presented its material according to the plan it worked out months ago.

Yet the 36 men and two women on the committee are adrift in this sea of evidence and in fear of getting swamped.

They do not yet know how — or whether — they will turn the mass of material and the 659 bland statements of fact, from which they've been working, into articles of impeachment that can stand up in the House of Representatives and, if necessary, the Senate.

Consequently, some committee Democrats and those Republicans who have been inclined toward impeachment have become uncertain and even a bit panicky, according to one source, over the possibility that their effort may fall apart.

In the privacy of their caucuses, some Demo-

The Judiciary Committee also fears being swamped

crats—mostly liberals—have urged that Chief Counsel John Doar or someone on his staff begin acting like an advocate, a prosecutor, and put the evidence together.

Chairman Peter Rodino, Jr. D. N.J. stubbornly clinging to the hope that he can maintain bipartisanship even in a vote for impeachment, has refused these pleas.

The moment is near, according to a committee source, for the staff is now drafting proposed articles of impeachment — perhaps as many as 20 — for presentation to the committee beginning about July 15.

And during the week or two that follows, it is Rodino's hope that the committee—with Republicans joining in or playing the antagonist role—will debate the theories of the case against the President and the proposed articles.

Some articles may be changed or dropped. Others may be added.

It is possible impeachment will be rejected. Privately, Rodino doesn't think so. He expects to send

articles and a resolution of impeachment to the House floor during the first week in August.

Next week, the committee is expected to decide, among other things, whether to make public some of the evidence it has received in secret, how many witnesses will be called, and how far the President's attorney, James D. St. Clair, will be able to go in arguing for his client.

Democrats are deeply split on the question of what evidence, if any, should be made public. Republicans, their wavering loyalty to the President a little more firm at the moment, are expected to battle for a long list of witnesses and to give St. Clair traditional courtroom rights—of argument and cross-examination.

The open meetings, however, may also become a forum for a display of impatience and dissatisfaction. While members discount reports that the inquiry has lost its momentum, they share a deep concern that the public may be losing confidence in the committee and interest in impeachment.

One of the more impatient Democrats, Jerome Waldie of California's 14th District, said: "The inquiry is right on target, right on schedule."

But Rodino has heard complaints like this one from Michigan Democrat John Conyers: "The politics of impeachment are beginning to take a toll. You can't have an aggressive defense attorney (St. Clair), an aggressive White House, an aggressive (Republican) minority, a passive (Democratic) majority and a neutral chairman."