

'Ready to Impeach'

Stories About Rodino Remark Stir Up Protests

Washington

The chairman of the House Judiciary Committee was accused of bias yesterday by some Republicans, and a White House spokesman called for him to be "discharged" from the inquiry into the possible impeachment of President Nixon.

The partisan furor erupted as the result of a newspaper report quoting Chairman Peter W. Rodino Jr. (Dem.-N.J.), as saying that all 21 Democrats on his committee were prepared to vote to recommend Mr. Nixon's impeachment.

Rodino took to the floor of the House yesterday afternoon to deny and denounce the report, which appeared in the Los Angeles Times, and afterwards he said that there was no chance that he would resign.

Referring to the newspaper article, Rodino declared: "I want to state unequivocally and categorically that this statement is not true. There is no basis in fact for it, none whatsoever."

At the White House, Ken W. Clawson, director of communications for the executive branch, called for Rodino to be "discharged as chairman and replaced by a fair-minded Democrat."

Clawson said that "Chairman Rodino's partisanship and the bias of other Democrats on the House Judiciary Committee was confirmed today out of Mr. Rodino's own mouth."

The article was written by Jack Nelson, an experienced Washington correspondent. He said yesterday that he stood by what he had written.

Another reporter, Sam Donaldson of the American Broadcasting Co., said in a broadcast last night that he had been at the lunchtime meeting in Rodino's office Thursday and that Rodino had, in fact, made the re-

Back Page Col. 4

RODINO

From Page 1

marks attributed to him.

But Donaldson reported that Rodino had emphasized that he had taken no nose count of his fellow Democrats but was only assessing how he believed they would vote.

Mr. Nixon's defense attorney, James D. St. Clair, said last night that he is "satisfied the committee members are going to wait until all the evidence is in." He said he did not believe that Rodino should quit.

If the newspaper account was accurate, this would have been the first time Rodino has expressed a personal view of how he or other committee Democrats would vote on the question of impeachment.

A number of Democrats on the committee have said that they would vote for impeachment, and several senior Republicans have stated that they were not inclined to do so.

As the House convened at noon yesterday, members of both parties gathered around the United Press International ticker just off the house floor and read the wire service account of the Los Angeles Times article.

Many Republicans and some Democrats complained angrily that the article showed that the chairman had prejudged the case against the President before all the evidence was in and before witnesses had been heard by the impeachment inquiry.

Rodino heard about the

complaints and, at the urging of Speaker of the House Carl Albert (Dem.-Okla.), Rodino took the unusual step of interrupting the debate on the House floor to deliver the denial speech.

Rodino was clearly agitated.

He insisted that he had never asked any of his committee members "how he or she will vote." Rather, he said, he had warned throughout the inquiry that "only when there is a complete presentation of evidence should members draw a conclusion."

He said that, if it became apparent that he had judged the evidence in advance and could not conduct the inquiry fairly, "I assure you that I would not be sitting as chairman, and I would withdraw myself from that capacity."

Asked afterward if he planned to resign, the chairman responded sharply, "absolutely not."

A senior Republican committee member, Representative Robert McClory of Illinois, took the floor after Rodino's speech to defend the chairman. "I know the chairman has tenaciously avoided statements that would prejudice the case," McClory asserted.

But Representative Leslie C. Arends of Illinois, the House Republican whip, complained that the article about Rodino was "one of the most disturbing things I've seen since this thing started."

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