

WXPPost

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'A Solid Vote for Impeachment'

"One of these days the Republicans are going to wake up and find they've got a bullet to eat for breakfast." That comment—made months ago by Jack Brooks, a senior Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee—described exactly what happened in the impeachment proceedings last week.

After a strange lull which had lasted for weeks, the Republicans on the committee suddenly found themselves facing up to an agonizing choice. While the outcome was uncertain as the week ended, it seemed quite clear that the President would not be able to line up a solid front of Republicans against impeachment.

The lull which ended last week was largely the work of the chief counsel for the Judiciary Committee, John Doar. For the previous month Mr. Doar had been laying out the evidence. In keeping with the wishes of committee chairman Peter Rodino, Mr. Doar presented the evidence in a colorless, toneless, odorless fashion. The aim was to baffle administration charges of partisan bias. Mr. Doar did the job so well that most of the committee were stupefied—even anesthetized.

For example, though leaks were not being suppressed at the time, not one committee member was alert enough to report to the press the hot item from Mr. Nixon's March 22 meeting which was included in a committee tape but excluded from the White House transcript as irrelevant. The hot item involved Mr. Nixon saying, "I want you all to stonewall it, let them

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plead the Fifth Amendment, cover up or anything else."

With the Democratic leadership not pressing the impeachment case, the President and his aides had a clear shot at organizing a united Republican stand against impeachment. Several times there seemed to be GOP agreement on such procedural matters as the calling of witnesses and the deplorable nature of leaks to the press.

But in the background, day after day developments kept shaping attitudes. For one thing the President refused to comply with repeated committee subpoenas for tapes of his White House conversations.

For another thing, Mr. Nixon's closest associates went down in guilty verdicts, guilty pleas or evasive testimony. The cumulative effect of these events was to cast severe doubt on Mr. Nixon himself. Robert McClory of Illinois, who in the illness of Edward Hutchinson of Michigan has been the leading Republican on the committee, put it thus: "The way this White House was run was very disturbing."

thought there would be a unanimous stand against impeachment by the minority on the committee.

That action backfired. Seven or eight Republicans, led by Mr. McClory, made it plain they were undecided and would not cast automatic party-line votes. Mr. McClory himself opened up a rationale for defection. He said the easy thing would be for Republicans to play follow-the-leader. Then he added: "But I think you're going to see some courage."

That is my impression, too. Basically the same forces which have been driving relentlessly toward impeachment for months are now operating on the Judiciary Committee. There has been wrongdoing on a colossal scale. Nobody can deny it. When it comes to a concrete decision on a specific set of charges it is proving as hard for the Judiciary Committee as it has proved for everybody else from the grand jury through the press and various Senate committees and petit juries to clear the President and his men.

At the moment the biggest question mark is the Supreme Court. A decision early this week might give the Republicans a procedural issue around which they can build a unanimous stand. But failing that, my guess is that the Judiciary Committee, by the end of the week will cast a solid vote for impeachment with enough Republicans deserting the President on a strong enough charge to carry the case through the House and on to the Senate.