

# House Judiciary: The Return to Partisanship

The House Judiciary Committee's descent Friday into bitter partisan infighting after two days of stately debate publicly revealed what a small bipartisan bloc of moderates was up against behind closed doors for months of the impeachment inquiry.

On their good behavior for their first nationally televised exposure, noisily partisan committee members reverted to form when the inquiry got down to the specifics of the articles of impeachment: hardcore Republicans trumpeting their bitter-end defense of President Nixon and fire-eating Democrats delivering jeremiads against him—both sides drowning out the moderates.

Thus those moderates—who long ago decided, regretfully in many cases, that Mr. Nixon must be impeached—still had to cut through intense partisanship on both sides to achieve a bipartisan majority that would be supported in the House, the Senate and the nations.

What has made their task so difficult all year has been the polarized condition of the Judiciary Committee. Its Democrats are to the left of House Democrats generally; its Republicans are well to the right of the House Republican mainstream.

The hardcore of Nixon Republicans on the committee have been particularly hellbore under the prodding of Rep. Delbert Latta of Ohio, who went on the committee this year for the purpose of defending the President and is expected to leave once the impeach-

*“Table-pounding and high decibel polemics . . . gave the public a taste of what closed-door sessions have been like.”*

ment inquiry is completed. Republicans departing from the party line in closed sessions have been subjected to grimaces, groans and sneers from Latta. Such pressure has been so intense that some moderates long ago stopped attending caucuses of Judiciary Committee Republicans.

Nor have the Democrats been free from partisanship. Since the beginning, Chairman Peter Rodino consistently has resisted, then reluctantly gone along with moderate demands for bipartisan procedures. But Democratic fire-eaters have persisted in leaking confidential material to the press and seeking to expand the case against Mr. Nixon to such dubious areas as the bombing of Cambodia and impoundment of funds.

Serious efforts to draft articles of impeachment avoiding extreme partisanship and attracting a large bipartisan majority began secretly and informally two weeks ago among three moderates: Democratic Rep. Walter Flowers of Alabama and Republican Reps. Thomas Railsback of Illinois and William Cohen of Maine.

Four more moderate members—Democrats James Mann of South Carolina and Ray Thornton of Arkansas and Republicans Hamilton Fish Jr. of New York and M. Caldwell Butler of Virginia—were invited to a meeting in Railsback's office last Tuesday morning. The seven moderates found themselves in substantial agreement on two articles of impeachment, charging Mr. Nixon with obstruction of justice and abuse of power.

Their private meetings were joined by conservative Republican Rep. Lawrence Hogan of Maryland after his stunning announcement for impeachment Tuesday afternoon. Hogan, uncomfortable on his new impeachment limb, began pushing hard for articles that would attract other conservatives—particularly freshman Rep. Harold Froehlich of Wisconsin.

Momentarily, the partisans—particularly hardcore Nixon Republicans—seemed in retreat. As the Judiciary Committee convened Friday morning, one pro-impeachment Republican told us: “For the first time, I don't feel pressure on me.”

It was a premature feeling of relief. Indeed, Hogan had tasted the wrath of hardcore colleagues Tuesday on the House floor when Arizona's Rep. Sam Steiger gave him a raspberry cheer and Indiana's Rep. Roger Zion raised \$1,600 in contributions for Hogan's opponent in Maryland's Republican primary for governor. More importantly, relatively restrained conduct by Latta and other hardcore Republicans during the televised general debate Wednesday and Thursday did not survive Friday's session.

Table-pounding, high-decibel polemics by Latta, Indiana's David Dennis and New Jersey's Charles Sandman gave the public a taste of what closed-door sessions have been like these many months. The inappropriate response came from fire-eating Democrats Jerome Waldie of California and Robert Drinan of Massachusetts, reciting the cries of Mr. Nixon's Watergate involvement that few members of the committee's pro-impeachment majority could accept.

Television viewers might have been shocked when Latta gratuitously raised the extraneous matter of a bar association committee headed by committee impeachment counsel Albert Jenner recommending repeal of anti-prostitution laws. But not his colleagues. “That's par for the course for Delbert,” one Republican member told us. Thanks to Latta and his allies the impeachment road promises to be a long and bitter one.