



By James K. W. Atherton—The Washington Post

Rep. Robert McClory (R-Ill.): "A person cannot be the judge of his own cause."

WXPost

JUL 31 1974

## *E Pluribus Unum*

### Nation Gets Rare Look at Legislative Process

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Everybody kept calling it an ordeal, the terrible drama of impeachment that the House Judiciary Committee staged for the nation via television.

The otherwise peaceful ulcer of Rep. Walter Flowers of Alabama was offered in evidence. Rep. William Hungate of Mis-

#### Commentary

souri resorted to sunglasses, his weary eyes stung by the glaring television lights. Rep. William Cohen of Maine had ear trouble, which made it difficult to hear the debate, a welcome affliction at times. Every committee member said, over and over again, how anguished he was.

But you know, down deep, Mr. Chairman, they sort of enjoyed it. For the House of Representatives, an assembly where personal glamor is scorned, the impeachment hearings provided an institutional ego trip. For the American public, it was a grand civics lesson in how things work at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue.

Rep. Lawrence J. Hogan, the Republican from Prince George's County, was peppered with bitter remarks from his conservative friends last week when he announced for impeachment. Now, he says, he is getting cordial notes of congratulation.

"Our colleagues," said Hogan, beaming, "are saying that we have enhanced the prestige of the House. Everybody's used to seeing those buffoons from the Senate

See COMMITTEE, A16, Col. 5

## COMMITTEE, From A1

on TV. We've shown that the House operates with real dignity."

Rep. M. Caldwell Butler, a hitherto little-known freshman from southwest Virginia, stepped through the lobby doors off the House floor. "Here he comes," an elder colleague proclaimed, with a touch of the needle, "star of stage, screen and television."

At the end of the ordeal, the 38 committee members were exchanging autographs with each other, collected as keepsakes for their grandchildren, no doubt. "E Pluribus Unum," as the banner on their committee room wall proclaims. From many, there was one awesome moment of history.

For the American audience, the civics lesson was just like the ones they teach in high school, partly genuine and partly hokum. Congress, let it be said, does not usually do business with such humid rhetoric about the Founding Fathers. Nor do the 435 representatives always stay in their seats so obediently. The minority, in usual circumstances, is not so long winded; the majority usually shuts it up.

Still, if people were watching, they saw a rare glimpse of a legislative committee at work, tedious and careful, proceeding through the

words which, line by line, section by section, added up to an impeachment charge against the President. They spoke in quaint phrases:

"I thank the gentleman for his valuable remarks."

"Reserving the right to object, Mr. Chairman, and I will not object."

"I yield 45 seconds to the gentleman from New York."

Those antique expressions of courtesy still lubricate the legislative process. They are necessary grace notes in a game that is supposed to produce collective judgment out of bitter differences.

Above all, with rare lapses, the Judiciary Committee maintained its civility before the cameras.

Indeed, once they were past that initial trauma of voting the first article of impeachment on Saturday night, the committee members settled comfortably into the routine of voting a second and a third one. It was the normalcy of the proceedings, despite the florid rhetoric, that may be remembered best by history, the orderly way a collection of such different folks proceeded to do the awesome deed.

Parliamentary gamesmanship, a staple in the House of Representatives, ate up a lot of time without changing the outcome in any significant way. Even some members got dizzy when a Sie-

berling amendment and a McClory amendment and a Wiggins amendment were stacked up on the Hungate substitute to the Donohue resolution.

Chairman Peter W. Rodino Jr., who presided with a magisterial gavel, was a lot more benign than your average House committee chairman. He hardly said a word for himself, beyond the opening pieties. He allowed members of both parties to dispute on how they should proceed and accepted their collective decisions in good humor.

"There is one hour and 20 minutes remaining," Congressman Flowers asserted at one crossroads. "That is 80 minutes, is it not? That would be 40 minutes to a side. I realize this is the Judiciary Committee, and we don't deal with these numbers very often."

Such small jokes are common in congressional discourse. Congressman Hungate, who represents Mark Twain's old home district in Missouri, offered comic relief of a higher order.

"As I hear the argument," Hungate told his fellow lawyers, "I think I know now why there are not lawsuits in heaven. The other side has all the good lawyers."

Those personal glimpses were educational, too. In between the dramatic mo-

ments, different characters performed on screen, people who lacked the majesty of a presidential entrance or even the glitter of a handsome senator.

Hutchinson, the ranking blank on the Republican side. Barbara Jordan, a beefy woman with a voice made for Shakespeare. Hungate's cracker barrel. Conyers' Mr. Cool. Railback's nasal earnestness. Charlie the Sandman, tossing grit in everybody's eyes. Harold Donohue, whose lullaby could put anyone to sleep.

James Mann, the slow-draw marksman from South Carolina. Drinan, the baleful priest, not the hot-eyed radical people thought. Trent Lott, the Jaycee from Dixie. Dennis and Wiggins and Mayne, granite faces and razor arguments. Joe Holtzman, cold steel from "a good ole boy." Elizabeth Brooklyn.

What can you make of them? They were an expressive collection of American voices, homely and handsome, comic and vain and tedious, serious and agonized and occasionally eloquent. Yet collectively they are powerful politicians, powerful enough to topple a President, anyway. It really is E Pluribus Unum—the branch of government that operates without ruffles and flourishes.