

Under Public Scrutiny

The experience of the past week should surely have laid to rest the reservations expressed earlier by some members of Congress and the public that live radio and television coverage of the impeachment process would be a dangerous infringement both of Congressional dignity and the rights of the President.

The House Judiciary Committee has acted with complete propriety. Charges that the President was being persecuted by a lynch mob or kangaroo court fell flat, simply because anyone concerned could see for himself that it was not so.

No one would pretend that the Representatives were oblivious to their wide audience, or unmindful of the impression they were creating individually and collectively; but instead of detracting from the proceedings, the constant scrutiny of the electorate probably enhanced the members' sense of accountability. Instead of whipping up emotions, the public debates let the American people see the interplay of evidence, law and politics that makes impeachment different from all other judicial or legislative processes.

The House of Representatives, which has come in for more than its share of unfair slurs in the past, has only increased in stature as a result of this unprecedented exposure. The Rules Committees of the House and Senate certainly have an obligation to impose strict controls over the technical arrangements for coverage, to insure that the electronic media provide an accurate and dignified portrayal of the proceedings, and do not interpose themselves into the deliberations.

But of the basic decision to permit live coverage of the full House debate and probable Senate trial, there should be no further question. Impeachment of the President of the United States is too solemn a proceeding to be carried out behind closed doors. The public has the right and the responsibility to watch it happen.