

Dramatic public shift supports impeachment

By Louis Harris
The Harris Survey

Public support for the impeachment, conviction and removal from office of President Nixon has grown substantially in the days since the House Judiciary Committee recommended articles of impeachment against him.

At the same time, public attitudes toward the impeachment process—and those involved in it—have undergone a dramatic shift, to the point where 47 per cent of the public fully expect that President Nixon will be removed from office.

Two-thirds of the American people now believe that the House of Representatives should impeach the President, a special Harris survey concluded Friday reveals. In two weeks, support for impeachment has grown from 53-34 to 66-27 per cent.

Significantly, by 49-43 percent, people who voted for the President in 1972 now favor impeachment, and Republicans oppose it only by a narrow one per cent margin, 45-44.

The number of people who believe that the Senate ought to convict him has grown correspondingly and now is 56 per cent, a majority for the first time, with 31 per cent opposed. Two weeks ago, the Harris survey found 47 per cent ready to support the President's removal from office and 34 per cent opposed.

Republicans oppose conviction by 52-31 per cent, and those who voted for the President in 1972 share this view by 50-34 per cent.

Thus, it can be concluded that the President still has hard-core support from about 31 per cent of the public, although by all measure his support was badly eroded by the Judiciary Committee's decisive vote to impeach him.

At the same time, there was a substantial shift away from skepticism about the impeachment process.

Two weeks ago, when 47 per cent thought he should be convicted, only 27 per cent thought he would be. Now, with 56 per cent supporting his conviction, 47 per cent think it will happen.

The shift from 55 per cent who felt before the Judiciary Committee vote that Nixon would not be removed from office to a 47-40 per cent plurality that now feels he will means the American people have moved from a state of mind that impeachment and removal were unthinkable to an expectation that it will indeed happen.

Credit for bringing about this dramatic change in public expectations and attitudes can be traced directly to the sharp rise in public respect for the behavior of the House Judiciary Committee and its chairman, Rep. Peter Rodino, in the way the impeachment proceedings were handled.

Two weeks ago, only 36 per cent of the public had a positive attitude toward the committee. The measure of the respect for the committee has risen now to 62 per cent.

Similar shifts in public attitude embrace Rodino, Democrats and Republicans on the committee, committee counsels John Doar and Albert Jenner, the President's counsel, James St. Clair, and Special Watergate Prosecutor Leon Jaworski.

In the increased public respect for just about everyone connected with the impeachment proceedings, it is now evident that in taking action on Watergate and whether Nixon should be removed from office, Congress not only is measurably raising public respect for its performance but is going a long way toward restoring public confidence in the ability of the system to work.