

The White House and the 'Artful Dodge'

The impeachment panic now enveloping President Nixon was revealed when chief anti-impeachment legal strategist James D. St. Clair secretly questioned key Republican congressmen Wednesday morning on the "artful dodge" ploy of sending a pro-forma vote of impeachment to the Senate for trial.

St. Clair, mightily regarded in the House as a fine lawyer with a lousy case, explored the now-discredited ploy at a private breakfast with the Choder and Marching Society, an informal social group of Republican congressmen which Mr. Nixon himself helped found 25 years ago.

"He was obviously interested in it," one key Republican who attended the closed-door breakfast on Capitol Hill told us.

The matter came up when St. Clair was asked if he saw any political advantage for Mr. Nixon to abort the predictably devastating House impeachment debate—now expected to yield at least a 2-1 margin against the President—and get the articles of impeachment sent immediately to the Senate for trial. Ducking a direct answer, St. Clair started questioning his hosts about the idea.

He got a rude awakening. An anti-impeachment Republican told him the proposal, first floated to President Nixon by two Republicans through Melvin Laird weeks ago, was an insult to the House.

At the very moment St. Clair was revealing White House interest in finessing televised debate on the House

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floor, Nixon aide Patrick Buchanan was peddling the same line to reporters at Godfrey Spurling's breakfast club.

St. Clair's suggestion, that aborting serious debate and a meaningful vote in the House would get Republicans off the hook, evoked hollow laughter. That might have been true a month ago, but the 30-odd Republicans breaking with St. Clair knew that the real reason for examining the idea now was to get not them but Mr. Nixon off the hook of ruinous House debate. Mr. Nixon scarcely lifted a finger for his party in the 1972 campaign.

A footnote: The fact that Laird played emissary for Republican Reps. Louis Frey of Florida and John McCollister of Nebraska, original backers of the artful dodge ploy, shows that his old colleagues in the House are making full use of his unique backroom talents.

Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski's office handled the milk scandal indict-

ment of John B. Connally with extraordinary security precautions in an effort to mitigate the previous flood of anti-Connally publicity which will seriously handicap efforts to convict him.

Total secrecy was maintained on the indictment. It was typed by high-ranking officials on the prosecution force instead of secretaries. Jaworski, who has excused himself from the case because of old Texas association with Connally, was not informed that the indictment was coming. Even after the indictment was announced, Jaworski's aides refused to discuss the case.

It may be too late. Edward Bennett Williams, famed defense lawyer representing Connally, intends to argue that his client's interests were damaged by the deluge of publicity preceding Connally's indictment for bribery and perjury.

Jaworski's lawyers regard that publicity as disgraceful, but they were not at fault. The leaks probably came from attorneys for erstwhile Connally associate J. Re Jacobsen. In fact, the special prosecution force has privately

scolded Jacobsen's lawyers for highly unethical conduct.

The publicity was an obvious attempt to win total immunity for Jacobsen in return for damaging testimony against Connally—in effect, plea bargaining via the media. It did not succeed. Although Jacobsen's testimony against Connally is expected to be critical, he was indicted for bribery along with Connally.

Democratic Sen. Birch Bayh of Indiana is running into potentially serious problems in his re-election campaign against Indianapolis Mayor Richard Lugar, once described as President Nixon's "favorite" mayor.

Secret polls taken by the respected Cambridge Survey Research for Bayh show a steady increase in Lugar's support, while Bayh holds firm at 48 per cent. Thus, in May 1973, pollster Patrick Caddell pegged Lugar at 27 per cent, last November at 34 per cent and in his latest survey, completed in July, only 7 points behind Bayh: 41 per cent to Bayh's 48 per cent.

What disturbs Bayh's operatives is this steady accretion of Lugar's support plus the decline from 61 per cent to 55 per cent in Bayh's rating as a "good" senator.

Three major reasons for Lugar's gains, despite the Indianapolis police scandals, are Bayh's long record of support for strong gun-control legislation and his pro-busings, pro-abortion record.