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PART II

# A REPORTER IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

## II—SPRING AND SUMMER NOTES

**R**OOM 2141 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The House Judiciary Committee's room. The room is on the first or second floor, depending on which street you enter from. (Including a garage, there are entrances to this building on three levels.) Police are stationed outside the door. Television cameras are being set up in the hallway. Also in the hallway are yellow ropes to hold back waiting spectators. One could almost follow the story of Watergate and the impeachment by tracing the route of the yellow ropes. Nearly a year ago, they were outside the meetings of the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities—the Ervin committee. Then they were outside the hearings of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which was inquiring into the firing of Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox. And they were outside the hearings of the Senate Rules and Administration Committee, briefly, in November, at the time of the confirmation of Vice-President-designate Ford. Now they are here, for the inquiry into the President's impeachment.

The walls and the carpeting of the Judiciary Committee's room are pale green. On the walls are paintings of Peter Rodino's predecessors as committee chairman: Hatton W. Sumners, of Texas; George S. Graham, of Pennsylvania; Emanuel Celler, of New York. The committee is to meet at ten o'clock, but at ten the thirty-eight members are just beginning to file in. Today, there is to be another "briefing," at which members merely talk, as opposed to a "meeting," at which they vote or make decisions. Rodino has been calling the briefings as a kind of cathartic exercise while postponing potentially divisive questions until he can find a consensus, and while giving the staff time to gather the evidence and prepare papers on procedural questions as they arise. Reporters are still taking

their readings of the committee members, getting to know them, cultivating them. The committee members do not seem to mind having these new-found friends or to shrink from their sudden celebrity. Estimates are made of which members are "hard-line" for the President, which ones are "pro-impeachment," and which ones are the "undecideds." It is generally assumed that a majority of the Republicans are hard-line, but it is difficult to be sure even of that. It may be that some statements are being made now for public consumption; the evidence may crack the hard line. It is also generally assumed that most of the Democrats feel that the President's actions warrant impeachment. Whether committee members who are put in the undecided column really belong there only they know. As the members file in, the reporters surround them, asking questions, and the photographers take pictures—especially of Rodino. He is wearing a dark-blue pin-striped suit, a blue-and-white striped shirt. A rosette of the Knights of Malta is in his lapel, and a blue silk handkerchief is in his pocket. He looks almost dapper. Rodino is of medium build. His complexion is ruddy—setting off his full head of wavy hair, which is partly gray

and partly white—and he smiles a lot. The members take their seats on two tiers—the Democrats to Rodino's right, with the exception of the thirty-two-year-old Elizabeth Holtzman, of New York, and the thirty-six-year-old Wayne Owens, of Utah, junior Democrats, who spill over onto the Republican side. John Doar, the special counsel to the inquiry, and Albert Jenner, the minority counsel, with two assistants, sit facing the committee, at what would ordinarily be the witness table. Word spreads that two White House aides are here. They are spotted quickly: two young men who look much alike, pale, sitting stiffly.

At ten-twenty-five, Rodino gavels for order and says, "The chair will first read a statement." He reads, "It has been two months since the House of Representatives, by an overwhelming and historic vote, authorized and directed this committee to investigate whether grounds exist to impeach Richard M. Nixon, President of the United States." In his slightly high-pitched voice, laced with a New Jersey accent, Rodino continues reading: "As regards the President himself, we have been respectfully patient. The courts were patient. The House has been patient. The people have been patient for



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