

NIXON DESERVES A FAIR TRIAL: IMPEACH HIM NOW! or
A REPORT OF THE NATIONAL IMPEACHMENT CONFERENCE.

Introduction

Around the beginning of the month of November, 1973, members of the Washington Area Impeachment Coalition (WAIC) began calling people around the country to learn what they were doing. We asked them about the idea of a national conference sometime in early December to talk about the formulation of a national program and an organizational structure for the impeachment movement. WAIC, as a coalition of individuals from approximately 25 organizations in the D.C. area, had initiated such a discussion because of a felt lack of national co-ordination and leadership on the impeachment issue.

WAIC issued a call for a national meeting after several weeks of discussion. The New American Movement, a national organization based in Minneapolis, Minn., joined in the call for a conference in Washington, D.C. the weekend of Dec. 3 and 9.

Though there was little time between the call and the actual holding of the conference itself, over 60 people from 12 cities and towns came. Represented were: Minneapolis, Minn., Philadelphia, Pa., Washington, D.C., New York, N.Y., Ossining, N.Y., Chapel Hill/Durham, N.C., Buffalo, N.Y., Pittsburgh, Pa., Harrisburg, Pa., Reading, Pa., Worcester, Ohio, and Madison, Wisc. In addition there were reports on activities occurring in Bethlehem, Pa., Los Angeles, Cal., Denver, Colo., Eugene, Ore., and Syracuse, N.Y.

Reports

The conference began with activity reports from the various groups represented. About half of the groups present had begun impeachment work during the summer, but most of the energy around the issue was generated after the "Saturday night massacre."

Without exception the work that people had been doing was "mass work," i.e., petitioning, the renting of billboards, speak-outs, town meetings and impeach-ins, demonstrations, mock impeachment trials, wall newspapers, guerrilla billboards, poll-taking on the street and the dissemination of literature, bumper stickers, T-shirts and pre-paid post cards.

People had met with positive responses from all kinds and classes of people. There was some variance as to the degree of support or active participation on the part of those reached according to the particular group and the particular region. For example, Minneapolis people had had much enthusiasm and support among working people but generally negative experiences as far as active support on college campuses. Chapel Hill/Durham had experienced much enthusiasm and on-going work from the college campuses.

There were a number of particularly original ideas put forward that people had done/were planning to do. In New York City, for example, the New York Campaign to Impeach Nixon was attempting to get City Councilperson Paul O'Dwyer to help in sponsoring a city-wide referendum on the question of Nixon's impeachment. In addition, Queens College New American Movement was planning an Impeachment Fair under the theme, "If Nixon Can Turn the Presidency into a Circus, Then We Can Turn Impeachment into a Fair." Nixon dart boards, "Rosemary swivel-twist-contortion games", assorted booths and other more comical yet topical displays would be part of such a fair. Another planned action in New York City was a "Screeching Impeach-in" in Times Square on New Year's Eve. People would be located throughout the crowd and at five of 12:00 begin yelling, "Impeach!, Impeach!", attempting to get large numbers of people present to do the same.

Ossining, N.Y. had put out a packet of materials based upon the use of a poll of people on the streets. The poll asked people to indicate their opinion about Nixon remaining, resigning or being impeached. If they supported Nixon they were given leaflets reproducing editorials from a conservative local newspaper calling for Nixon's resignation. If they were undecided, they pulled out a sheet explaining the process of impeachment and the reasons why it should happen. If they were supportive of either Nixon's resignation or his impeachment, they were asked to sign a petition supporting that position.

Philadelphia, Pa. people were planning a Dec. 14 tape-in downtown in which people will be interviewed on the street, taped and the tapes sent to Peter Rodino, head of the House Judiciary Committee.

Minneapolis, Minn. people were preparing for a demonstration on Dec. 16 (the 200th anniversary of the Boston Tea Party) connecting impeachment to the gas shortage around the theme, "Impeach King Richard, No Gas Rationing Without Representation."

Most groups, whether broad-based coalitions (as in Durham with the North Carolina AFL-CIO, Black Panther Party, New American Movement, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and student groups working together) or small, committed action groups, had met with a very positive response from wide sectors of the population. Pittsburgh had collected over 14,000 names on petitions, Minneapolis over 10,000, Philadelphia over 8,000 and the small college of Worcester, Ohio, 700.

During this discussion of local activities the possibility of a military coup was brought up by several people, as well as the importance, concomitantly, of work among the military.

Program

The afternoon session on Saturday began with peoples' ideas for what the impeachment movement could do in the future nationally. As the program developed it was clear there were three primary concerns that motivated our eventual decision: 1. Our contacts with the House Judiciary Committee and representatives of the House suggested that the Articles of Impeachment would not be reported out of the Judiciary Committee onto the floor of the House until sometime in April. Just a day before one of the conference attendees had spoken for an hour and a half with the head lawyer of the Judiciary Committee and Congressman Rangle, and it was on the basis of that information that we proceeded. 2. We were aware that a large number of locally-based, grass-roots organizations and coalitions were established and working in positive and effective ways already, and our program would be one which would help them in their work, not be viewed as a competitor. 3. We felt that what we were talking about was essentially an intensive campaign over a relatively short period of time.

The program decided upon was as follows:

1. JAN. 10- JAN. 20 HOME TOWN ACTIONS DIRECTED AT CONGRESSPEOPLE.

Congress will be adjourning around Dec. 20 and return to Washington around Jan. 20. It was felt that confronting Congresspeople while they were home was very important. Some of the possible actions: picketing or visiting their homes, setting up town meetings to pin them down publicly on their impeachment position or sending delegations to their office.

2. JAN. 21- JAN. 25 WASHINGTON LOBBY-IN.

The week after Jan. 20, people would come to Washington where they would meet with their Congressperson to follow up on the Home Town Actions. There would be more visible activities for those involved, i.e., possible marches through downtown Washington by the lobbyists with banners and signs identifying where they're from and why they're here, as well as late afternoon or evening meetings with singers, speakers, entertainment, opportunities for discussion, etc. Different cities or regions would come on different days.

Note: A major discussion preceeded the formulation of these two points of the program, centering around the viability or non-viability of a Jan. 20 "Inauguration Anniversary" demonstration. Though there was support for the idea from several quarters the decision was made not to call for it for three major reasons: such a demonstration required a massive amount of work, and an energy-drain afterwards would be one side-effect; the major focus of impeachment work should be on Congresspeople when they are home as well as when they return to Washington; and there were problems never before encountered in such an action due to the gas "shortage", Jan. 20 falling on a weekend. The result was the two-part program agreed to above.

3. FEB. 1- FEB. 15 LOCAL IMPEACH-INS.

Teach-ins, town meetings similar to those held in a large number of locations already.

4. FEB. 18 "DAY OF TRUTH" Local demonstrations and actions, strong, creative, visible, not necessarily massive, dependent upon the locality.

Feb. 18 is officially recognized as the day for celebrating George Washington's birthday. It was expressed that this day could be not only a "Day of Truth" about the Watergate affair but about the energy "driasis" which by that time will probably be quite serious. For example, a "Day of Truth" could demand the disclosure of Nixon's hidden dealings with the energy monarchs at the expense of the people. Throughout the conference the importance of tying together the energy "crisis" with impeachment was repeatedly discussed.

5. MARCH 1-3 NATIONAL IMPEACHMENT CONFERENCE

This would be a much larger, more representative conference, held somewhere in the midwest, to discuss point (6) below as well as future impeachment activities as they were felt to be important at that time.

6. MASS DEMONSTRATION IN WASHINGTON, D.C. SOMETIME IN APRIL OR EARLY MAY.

The date has to be flexible because we do not know when the House Judiciary Committee will actually be reporting out the Articles of Impeachment to the House floor. The statement agreed to at the conference said, "We project a national action in Washington sometime towards the middle of April or the beginning of May, the exact date to be determined by the March 1-3 conference. But we recognize the situation may change so that there may be a need for a date set for such an action in response to a crisis or an earlier floor consideration of the issue. In such a case we would consult with others in the impeachment movement to set that date."

Implementation and Structure

The first major discussion centered around the question of the exact functions of a national office in Washington in relation to local groups around the country. Throughout the discussion the intent in trying to delineate the responsibilities listed below was to define exactly what kind of an organization we were creating. We felt that in the process of coming up with this definition of respective local

and national responsibilities several things would be clarified: first, the need and nature of a national staff; second, the need and nature of more co-ordination and information exchange between various local groups through the medium of a national clearinghouse; and third, the need and nature of expansion beyond those present that weekend.

The point was made and agreed to that one unique aspect of the impeachment movement is that it is very grass-rootsy, to the degree that there is no real national structure to it. That was felt to be both good and bad. It was good in the sense that what was happening was for real and not just a shell of a movement with a few "leaders" at the top and no local connections. It was bad in the sense that there was a felt need for a national structure, national co-ordination and a nationally projected program, done in a way which would not hamper local work but serve to facilitate and improve it.

The agreed to outline on functions was as follows:

1. HOME TOWN ACTIONS

- a. Research and selection of Congresspeople, especially the Judiciary Committee and undecided members (though not to exclude others): national and local joint responsibilities.
- b. Contacting and/or recruitment of people for actions: national and local responsibilities.
- c. Setting up meetings or determining the form of action relative to Congresspeople, including publicity: local responsibility.
- d. A definition of the strategy and tactics to be used at meetings that would be set up: national and local responsibilities.
- e. National publicity for local actions: national, with the possibility of some local people coming to D.C. to do publicity work if so desired.
- f. Informing of local groups of activities planned by other local groups: national.

2. NATIONAL LOBBY-INS.

- a. (a) through (f) of above--the same.
- b. Scheduling of meetings with Congresspeople: national responsibility.
- c. Housing: national responsibility.
- d. Organization of other events for lobby-iners while in D.C.: national responsibility.

3. IMPEACH-INS AND FEB. 18 DAY OF TRUTH.

- a. Primarily local responsibility with some suggestions and sharing of successes and failures of similar events locally by national staff.

4. MARCH 1-3 CONFERENCE.

- a. National staff to initiate with active input and cooperation of local groups.

In the consideration of a name two elements came into focus: first, what we would consider ourselves a national organization, and second, that we should call ourselves a "campaign" rather than a "coalition" or something else. The primary reason was that we strongly felt the need for a series of strong, intensive, on-going activities in the immediate months ahead. A national organization is necessary to help in that process, and "campaign" best gets across that concept of the importance of the coming months.

The name chosen was: NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO IMPEACH NIXON.

We decided that we would attempt to enlist the support of local and national groups

as participating organizations, the major emphasis being on stimulating the formation of local impeachment coalitions and on seeing them as the major vehicle to our goal. The degree of participation by local groups would be "organically determined by the localities we are in contact with."

We decided to search out working contacts, to consist of one woman and one man from each local coalition or grouping. The functions of such working contacts would be threefold, in terms of the relation to the national office: 1. They would serve as contacts in a national "The Day After" telephone tree (see below). 2. They would serve as a nationally representative structure which would make major decisions, after polling the local membership, if the need would arise (if the Judiciary Committee moved much faster than expected, for example). 3. They would be conduits for information to and from the national office in Washington. One point emphasized was that the working contacts would be as responsible on major policy matters to their local groups as the D.C. office staff would be responsible to the national working contacts, i.e., neither the D.C. staff nor the working contacts were seen as being totally autonomous, able to make major decisions without consultation with their constituency.

There was a valuable discussion on this question, with all of us wanting to see the most effective and democratic structure possible but with an eventual recognition that there was not enough of a national representation at this conference to make the working contacts formal representatives. It was hoped that the March conference would see a more clear delineation of the powers and division of responsibilities of both national staff and local working contacts, if not a different structure altogether. But we felt that this arrangement was the best that we could decide on at this point in time and history.

It was decided that the national office would set up a telephone tree nationally, to be called a "The Day After" (TDA) network. In the event of a crisis clearly demanding an immediate response, the tree could be activated to get the word around the country to all the impeachment contacts to do what they could as soon as possible. Such a tree would be set up with the idea of minimizing the number and cost of calls on the part of any one individual group.

A finance committee was formed and met to begin raising money so as to: open and staff immediately a national office in Washington which would put out a regular newsletter, keep in touch with people across the country by phone, search out and recruit contacts across the country, travel to other cities where necessary, help local groups prepare for the different aspects of the national impeachment program, organize the Washington side of the Lobby-in, initiate the planning for the March conference and, if possible, fund individuals in local areas to work full-time on impeachment if such funds were available and needed. It was suggested that local groups would try to send 10% of their fund-raising successes to the national office.

In Closing

We accomplished a great deal in one weekend. Our program is ambitious and demanding of a great deal of hard work. But we acted knowing that there is a strong base already forming out in the country more than capable of linking up to and fully utilizing this program and the resources we can pull together. In addition, we believe the political period necessitates a continuation of the kinds of important activities that have occurred and are occurring at the present time. The coming months are crucial ones, not just for the impeachment movement but for all the people of this country. We are faced not only with the necessity of removing a corrupt and unpopular President but with the necessity of dealing with a serious energy "crisis" through the winter months and beyond, in addition to numerous other problems.

We believe that the impeachment movement is capable of rising to the challenge of all these difficulties. It is with that belief that we invite you to join us in our NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO IMPEACH NIXON.

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO IMPEACH NIXON
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