

Nation
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The "Front" on Trial

THE Christian Front trial opened four weeks ago with spectacular advance notices. It is proceeding like a slow-motion drama with the principal characters unaccountably missing. In some ways the script seems to have been edited by the Legion of Decency; only twice has the name of Charles E. Coughlin evaded the censors. If the story unfolded thus far seems fragmentary and anti-climactic, it nevertheless contains some lurid episodes and some memorable lines. The real question is what the story will ultimately reveal about anti-democratic legions in America. That has not been answered.

The bulk of the prosecution's case, as presented to date, rests on the testimony of informers employed by the FBI and a confession by one of the defendants. While details may be apocryphal, the prosecution's case is a plausible one. The defendants, it is asserted, were the fighting corps of the Christian Front. Their ranks men were conspiring to commit acts of violence and to initiate a reign of disorder. They were also dreaming of wholesale insurrection. But did they represent a "clear and present danger" to democratic survival? As sixteen men they did not. Even as sixteen well-armed, audacious men they did not. As such they were political gangsters, and we have adequate laws for dealing with gangsterism. What remains to be shown is that the government was justified in holding a treason trial, as well as in prosecuting them on specific counts. The most important clue is the belated testimony that Coughlin himself appointed John F. Cassidy, one of the principal defendants, to his Christian Front posts. This fact is not news; its introduction at the trial is. Will the clue be followed? Were there other higher-ups involved? To what degree has the Front penetrated the National Guard? One National Guard officer is among the defendants; what about the others who, one witness has said, were covertly aiding? Without knowing the answer to these questions we cannot answer the basic one: How dangerous is the Christian Front? And without the answer to that question we cannot to everyone else worth pumping, read public records and and prying reporters. In addition, they apparently talked tuted himself a research assistant to these two talented that A. A. Berle, Jr., may be the man—must have consti- the State Department—and internal evidence suggests "inside" facts bear sure marks of authority. Someone in nation in framing those particular sentences, other the two men on the wire. Even if they used their imagi- had the words of the quoted conversation from one of

Democracy is walking a tight rope. In dealing with its enemies it must truly appraise their strength; exposure is a form of defense. The value of the Christian Front trial lies in the picture it offers of democracy's foes. The greatest danger is that it will intensify hysteria and thereby conceal the truth we need to know. The government has made broad and sweeping charges, but the case is being prosecuted along narrow lines. And its net result may be to make martyrs of a band of terrorists while their more dangerous leaders remain hidden.