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First Lady Visits Dies Committee To Hear Youth Congress Defended

Between Sessions She Takes Seven Leaders to Luncheon at White House—Group Demands Inquiry Be Ended

By CHARLES W. HURD

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 30—Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt attended today's session of the House Committee on Un-American Activities to hear leaders of the American Youth Congress, of which she is an active sponsor, deny previous testimony that it was a Communist front and demand that the committee be disbanded and cease using "witch-hunting methods."

She sat a silent and intent auditor during two hours of exchanges between committee members and the three young men who testified jointly as one witness. As a demonstration of her interest in the witnesses she entertained them at luncheon at the White House. She had accompanied them on a train from New York City last night.

Mrs. Roosevelt's action was without precedent, and it was the more pointed in view of charges by Representative Dies of Texas, chairman of the committee, that the White House has given his committee no assistance. In addition, the President's wife declined an invitation to accept a seat of honor at the committee table.

For its own part, the committee took no notice of Mrs. Roosevelt after an opening courteous gesture,

and waited until 4 P. M. before calling the witnesses in which she was interested.

It occupied the earlier hours in morning and afternoon sessions with testimony first by Leon P. Smith, assistant dean of the University of Chicago, and an exhaustive presentation by William O'Dell Nowell of Detroit, a Negro and former Communist, who gave a long recital of Communist infiltration methods as he observed them prior to leaving the Communist party in 1936.

At the end of the morning session Mrs. Roosevelt told reporters:

"I was disappointed. I thought I would hear something new."

Mrs. Roosevelt became the first wife of a President to attend a meeting of a Congressional investigating committee when she took Miss Ishbel MacDonald in 1933 to hear Secretary Perkins testify on the thirty-hour week bill before the Senate Committee on Education and Labor. Her second attendance at a committee session came today.

The witnesses who appeared for the National Youth Congress were William Hinckley, former chair-

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man, who was specifically invited by the committee; Jack McMichael, present chairman, and Joseph Cadden, executive secretary.

Mr. Dies did not attend the committee session. Representative Starnes of Alabama sat as acting chairman, flanked by Representatives Voorhis of California and Mason of Illinois.

Mr. Starnes sent a telegram yesterday inviting the American Youth Congress to appear, and its spokesmen came armed with denials and counter-charges prepared in mimeographed form.

The witnesses described their organization as one composed of about sixty organizations interested in youth, these including a large number of the well-known Protestant and Jewish church organizations, various labor groups and others including the Young Communist League.

All these organizations sent delegates last Summer to a national convention in New York City, addressed later by Mrs. Roosevelt at Poughkeepsie. The joint membership of organizations affiliated with the group is more than 4,600,000.

Testimony by the officers showed that the group in its last fiscal year collected and spent about \$15,000, a showing that prompted Mr. McMichael to suggest that if any member of the committee wished to contribute, any sum would be welcome.

The testimony continued quietly for almost an hour until Mr. Hinckley had an opportunity to read part of a prepared statement which included the text of a petition adopted by the national assembly of the American Youth Congress and now being circulated generally in preparation for transmission to Speaker Bankhead.

Urges End of Dies Inquiry

The petition follows:

"Whereas the American Youth Congress is pledged—as stated in its creed—to work for the maintenance of civil rights guaranteed in the Constitution of the United States;

"Whereas the Dies committee threatens these civil rights by attempts to discredit trade unions and other American organizations under the cloak of a drive against 'foreign agents' misuse of Congressional power, intimidating members and staffs of such organizations, seizing records improperly and serving faulty subpoenas, conduct of un-American and unjust hearings, acceptance of hearsay, slander and surmise instead of evidence, denial of adequate hearing to organizations and individuals attacked and provoking a war hysteria with witch-hunting methods;

"Whereas such conduct on the part of the Dies committee tends to discredit the work of all other Congressional committees and weaken public confidence in the functioning of democracy;

"Resolved, That the Dies committee be discontinued immediately;

"Resolved, also, That we support

careful, constructive investigation of activities detrimental to American democracy and urge public support and Congressional appropriation for the La Follette civil liberties committee."

Denies "Witch-Hunting"

The committee listened in silence to the reading of this petition, and then Representative Starnes replied.

"We think you ought to proceed on the basis of fact and not of misinformation," he said. "What your views about this committee are, I don't care personally, and the committee doesn't care. We are trying to do a job, and furthermore a job that was imposed on us by Congress."

"We are making no charges; we are not witch-hunting. As American citizens you have the inalienable right to believe what you want to about this committee, but I don't care what you believe. We want to find out the truth. We will hear any organization placed in an unjust position by witnesses before the committee."

Mrs. Roosevelt first appeared at the hearing, unaccompanied and without notice, at about 11:15 A. M. She looked around for a seat. She wore a dark-green costume, including matching woolen coat and silk dress, with suede handbag and gloves and felt hat. Her coat and hat were trimmed with persian lamb.

When Representative Starnes noticed her, he stopped the testimony, rose and said:

"The chair takes note of the presence of the First Lady of the Land and invites her to come up here and sit with us."

"Oh, no thank you," Mrs. Roosevelt replied. "I just came to listen."

She then found a seat among the youth group, where she remained until 12:30, while Mr. Nowell testified until the committee was recessed for luncheon. Mrs. Roosevelt sat between Mr. Hinckley and Mr. McMichael.

When the morning session ended, Representative Voorhis asked if Mrs. Roosevelt wished to testify.

"It's just a question if I can contribute anything to you," she replied.

Then she turned to the youth group and said:

"I can take six of you."

This total turned to seven as Mrs. Roosevelt took along the three prospective witnesses, Mrs. Hinckley, Frances Williams, administrative secretary of the Youth Congress; Vivian Liebmann, publicity representative, and Joseph P. Lash, national secretary of the American Students Union.

Although the committee hearing resumed at 2 P. M., Mrs. Roosevelt waited until 3:44 to appear, again coming alone. She sat for a while among some 100 spectators, but when the group in which she was interested was called to testify she moved to a chair at one of the press tables, from which she could face the witnesses and hear them more clearly.



MRS. ROOSEVELT LISTENS TO A WITNESS AT DIES HEARING

The President's wife as she heard the testimony of William Nowell yesterday. With her are Mrs. William W. Hinckley, Jack McMichael, chairman of the American Youth Congress, and William W. Hinckley, right former head of the AYC.

James White West