

THE DIES COMMITTEE BEFORE THE BAR OF PUBLIC OPINION

The Dies Committee has been weighed in the balance of public opinion and found wanting. Seldom, if ever, has a Congressional Investigating Committee been so uniformly condemned by all parties and all shades of responsible opinion as has this Committee, both as to its methods and accomplishments.

At the press conference with the President on October 25, 1938, newspapermen requested his views on the Committee, the occasion being the examination of witnesses as to the Michigan situation. Mr. Roosevelt stated he distrusted himself to answer extemporaneously for fear of using unprintable language, and prepared a formal statement. Referring to the testimony charging Governor Murphy with treasonable conduct, the President said:

"Governor Murphy's painstaking and statesmanlike efforts to bring about a settlement of the sit-down strikes and to avert bloodshed and riot were not shrouded in secrecy. Every important move he made was communicated to the motor manufacturers and the union leaders affected, and was reported fully in the daily press. I received almost daily reports on the situation from the Governor.

"***** the Governor was informed by responsible officials of the National Guard that any attempt on the part of the National Guard forcibly to eject the sit-down strikers at Flint would result in bloodshed and riot. Knowing these facts the Governor labored in the open, in the American way, to bring about a prompt settlement of the labor trouble without resort to force.

"Governor Frank Murphy's great accomplishment elicited the commendation of all the important motor manufacturers involved, of Mr. Sloan and Mr. Knudsen of General Motors, of Mr. Chrysler of Chrysler Motors and of the Fisher Brothers of the Fisher Body Corporation, of Mr. Barrett of Hudson Motors and of Mr. Graham of Graham Motors.

"Three weeks ago, the civilized world was threatened by the immediate outbreak of a world war. Cool heads pleaded for the continuance of negotiations. People may properly differ as to the result of such negotiations but the fact remains that bloodshed was averted.

"In the Winter of 1937, Governor Murphy was confronted with the same kind of a situation on a smaller scale. He knew that if negotiations were broken off, bloodshed was inevitable. He worked successfully for the continuation of negotiations. As a result of his fine leadership, there is no doubt that hundreds and even thousands of human lives were saved. That is the American way of doing things."

Oswald Garrison Villard, former editor of The Nation, and now one of its contributing editors, succinctly described the proceedings of the Dies Committee as "an abominable travesty of justice."

Harold Hoffman, former Governor of New Jersey, and a conservative Republican who, along with Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, William Allen White and other prominent Americans, was pictured by Mr. Matthews as a Communist "front" because of his connection with the American Youth Congress, punctured the assumption of the Committee that one or two Communists on the large body of an organization could dominate and swing it to their views, that non-Communists, men and women of the standing and distinction involved, were as putty in the hands of Communists. He said:

"I don't know Dr. Matthews, but I picture him as a jittery, academic gentleman who gets himself all excited over the ills of a world he has become acquainted with only in the pages of musty books. I can imagine him nervously looking under his bed each night expecting to find a bomb or Heywood Broun.

"I don't know -- and don't care -- if I am a member of the advisory council of the American Youth Congress. If John L. Lewis asked me tomorrow to serve on the advisory council of the C.I.O., or if President Roosevelt asked me to accept membership on the board of advisors to the National Democratic Committee, I would accept with alacrity -- and then pray that they would call upon me for advice."

Lewis Milestone, noted motion picture director, speaking apropos of the Dies Committee's attempt to picture Hollywood as a hot-bed of subversive activity, stated:

"It seems to me that the hysteria of the Dies Committee's investigations have only succeeded in strengthening public belief in the organizations and movements they have attacked. For myself and for members of the motion picture industry whose sentiments are similar to my own, if our aid to these democracies now victims of Fascist aggression can be misinterpreted as un-American acts, then perhaps the Dies Committee has its own translation of the word democracy. We treasure that one word and believe that, in order to preserve it for ourselves, we must, and will, continue to give aid to our fellow-brothers who are fighting our battle against Fascism on foreign soil."

Miss Luise Rainer, noted actress and winner of the 1937 National Motion Picture Academy Award, expressed the general sentiment of intelligent opinion, thus:

"I do not believe in the so-called revelations made by the Dies Investigating Committee. I believe their purpose is purely destructive, aimed at discrediting worthwhile peace and anti-Fascist organizations which are so much needed in these worried times."

Stanley Isaacs, Republican President of the Borough of Manhattan, New York City, referring to the attempt to depict the Federal Theatre Project as Communist and to discredit W.P.A. and relief agencies in general, said:

"Committees which sit in Washington and attack development of the arts built up as part of the relief program, seem never to have taken the trouble to discover the reaction of the people of the cities and countryside to this work.

"As far as some of these critics are concerned, anything of any cultural value lies within their definition of the word 'boondoggling.' They cannot see the people's art, for their eyes are too clouded by the smoky atmosphere of the back rooms of their political hangouts."

In connection with Mr. Dies' activities concerning W.P.A. agencies, it is of interest to note that he at one time publicly announced the intention of subpoenaing General Hugh S. Johnson before his Committee to testify about alleged Communist domination of the W.P.A. organization in New York. General Johnson was at one time W.P.A. Administrator in New York. Commenting on this report, General Johnson, in his widely syndicated column, wrote:

"Of course, there were Communists on W.P.A. relief. But what is the matter with that? There is a Communist party in this country. It is no crime to belong to it. It openly proposes candidates for office and an insignificant number of citizens vote for them. Many sincere people believe in the principles of Communism. If the time ever comes in this country when a man can be persecuted or even discriminated against for his political beliefs, something will have happened to the very base of constitutional principles.

"As long as the program of any group is to try to change the laws or the Constitution of the United States by argument and the creation of a majority opinion, that is the very essence of our institutions and I don't know on what theory any people in any such group should be restricted in that right."

As a result of the views thus expressed, which so clearly did not coincide with the preconceived notions of Mr. Dies, General Johnson was not called to testify.

Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, described the Dies Committee activities in his usual vigorous language:

"The Committee of One-Hundred Per-Centers is once more on the loose in the land.***"

"They've gone into Hollywood and there discovered a great red plot. They found dangerous radicals there, led by little Shirley Temple. Imagine the great committee raiding her nursery and seizing her dolls as evidence!

"***** any man who has to resort to epithets instead of common sense is taking refuge in ignorance and is dangerous. A man who resorts to name-calling is a man to be shunned and not to be trusted with public office.

"The candidate who hasn't any platform can't do anything else to attract attention, so he calls his opponent a red. That is a contemptible type of campaign. It is the last resort of the arrant scoward."

Miss Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor, discussing the statements by Committee members, of three thousand alien Communists running wild in the country and the demand for the indiscriminate deportation of alleged Communists, said:

"The function of the United States Government in enforcing the immigration law is a quasi-judicial process of administrative law. It is therefore of utmost importance that, in the carrying out of this process, there should be absolute adherence to the Constitution, to the rights of individuals and a punctilious regard for all those safeguards of procedure which long experience has taught us preserve for men their liberty, their freedom and their opportunity to enjoy and profit by a democracy.

"The fact that Communists are unpopular, and I agree in this, does not justify us in placing within that category every other unpopular person, nor in deporting them without a scrupulous regard for the due process of law, the clear and certain ruling of the courts and the facts in the case."

The Dies Committee and many of its members, have, almost since the commencement of their hearings, extensively exploited the case of Harry Bridges, alleged Communist Union leader. Repeated demands for his instant deportation, as well as threats of impeachment against Miss Perkins for failure to follow these demands, have filled the press. Miss Perkins and others in her behalf have explained that delay in the case was occasioned by a desire to get a Supreme Court determination of the questions of law involved by a ruling in the pending Strecker case. This was on the advice of the Attorney General. Nevertheless, demands for Bridges' deportation persisted. Referring to this situation, the Secretary of Labor said:

"*** I cannot agree that I should have disregarded the recommendations of the administrative and legal officers of this department and of the Department of Justice in this case."

The late Paul Y. Anderson, distinguished Washington correspondent who, among other notable journalistic achievements, was responsible for the revelations uncovering the Teapot Dome scandal, speaking over a nation-side radio hook-up, said of Mr. Dies that "perhaps the most imposing thing about the Congressman is his magnificent gullibility." In his fifteen years as a Washington correspondent, he had "seen Congressional investigations that were slipshod" and "some that were shockingly unfair." Then he continued, "But, so help me, I have never seen one that approached the Dies Committee's performance in either of these respects. As a matter of fact, I have never seen a Congressional investigation that resembled this one at all."

Turning to the testimony regarding Governor Murphy and the Michigan strike, Mr. Anderson proceeded:

"For more than three days the committee pumped testimony into the record -- and what, from the committee's standpoint, is infinitely more important -- into the newspapers, all calculated to establish a general impression that the Automobile Workers Union was dominated by Communists and that the sit-down strikes were engineered and directed by Communists.

"I don't think any one who studied this performance could escape the impression that it was deliberately staged and that its purpose was to defeat Governor Murphy when he comes up for re-election next week. Furthermore, this episode illustrates that peculiar quality which makes the Dies Committee different from any Congressional committee I have ever seen in action. By that I mean the extraordinary presentation and manipulation of witnesses and testimony to produce a certain definite impression -- an impression deliberately sought by the committee from the outset, designed for political effect and carried out regardless of the damage which the truth suffers in the process.

"Of course, I don't mean to say that other committees have not been influenced by political considerations -- nearly all of them are to some extent. But all of them make a pretense of seeking the truth. The Dies committee is the lone exception in my time."

Some of the Congressional colleagues of Mr. Dies, speaking of the committee, have thus expressed themselves:

Congressman Byron N. Scott (California):

"I join with you in condemnation of Martin Dies' indiscriminate and unsubstantiated slander of good American citizens who hate Fascism and Nazism and all they represent."

Congressman Samuel Dickstein (New York):

"The Committee made no inquiry into the extensive propaganda flooding this country from abroad, nor has it given any thought to our present Mexican troubles, which may be traced directly to German propaganda. Cuba is likewise suffering from this type of propaganda. All in all, it is very regrettable that the very objects of the committee were diluted by this inefficient excursion into 'red baiting.'"

Congressman Frank E. Hook (Michigan):

"If there ever was a reactionary, if there ever was a demagogue in the House, it is Martin Dies. ***** The committee (on Un-American activities) has gone into the field to stop the march of labor. The committee says nothing about the things they should investigate, but they try to make believe that the march of labor, this great liberal force, is un-American.***** Had I known the purposes back of the establishment of that committee, it would have never received my vote."

Congressman John M. Coffee (Washington):

"Jefferson said this country should encompass 'free men, free speech and a free church.'"

"Who is un-American now? Oh, I recall we had the Fish committee a few years ago, which was a witch-pursuing expedition designed to hold up to public obloquy and condemnation every liberal political organization in the United States. Then we had another, a Democratic committee

the McCormack committee. Are we going to repeat now? My God, the whole Nation is crying out for succor in its distress. It is pleading for legislative aid to extirpate financial distress from the Senate and the House, and you spend the solemn time of the House of Representatives, in the ninth year of the depression, in trying to investigate what you characterize as un-American activities. To what a low degree have we sunk in the legislative chambers of the Congress of the United States."

Ex-Congressman Gerald J. Boileau (Wisconsin):

"American citizens, 'Be careful! Be careful with whom you associate, and be careful where you go, because a handful of Members of Congress down there in Washington who take unto themselves the consciences of the American people, who try to control your conscience and mine, who try to say what you shall think and with whom you will associate, will hold you before the American people as enemies of our great democracy. They will call you unpatriotic, and it will take you the rest of your life to convince the American people that you are really patriotic!"

The opinion of experienced newspaper observers of the Washington scene is not flattering to the committee's activities. Raymond Clapper, Washington commentator for the Scripps-Howard newspapers, after criticizing the methods of the committee, suggests a motive for Chairman Dies' readiness to permit the presentation of C.I.O. leaders as Moscow-controlled:

"An intelligent Congressional investigation would be informative -- one that went after facts instead of making itself a sounding board for the ghost stories of cranks.

"Mr. Dies was opposed for renomination in Texas by the C.I.O. and as soon as he won he came racing back to Washington and called to the witness stand the most bitter C.I.O. hater in the American Federation of Labor to smear as Communists rival labor leaders like John Brophy, of C.I.O., who is one of the most active laymen in the Catholic Church, a man with two daughters who are nuns and a son preparing for the priesthood. Some Communist! The Dies show has been the joke of Washington, the laugh of the press gallery, and useful tool through which Republicans on the committee could ask questions smearing the Roosevelt administration.

"I'm waiting to hear more about Shirley Temple and her flirtation with the Communists. The Dies witness tells us that Shirley has been unwittingly exploited by the Communists, then he shuts up tight. If they have anything on her, let's hear it. If not, then in the name of chivalry, sir, in the name of all that Southern manhood stands for, Congressman Dies of Texas, tell us.

"It is you, Congressman Dies, who is on trial."

Rodney Dutcher, NEA Staff Correspondent, agrees with his colleagues as to the unique character of the Dies committee -- unique, not in a flattering sense. He writes:

"No such loosely handled investigation has been covered previously by this generation of Washington correspondents."

Along the same line is the comment of Heywood Brown:

"If the Dies committee had used any sort of cross-examination whatsoever it might have held its more imaginative witnesses in bounds. Instead the more florid romancers were egged on as they seemed to be drawing to the end of the chapter. Martin Dies and his men seemed like eager infants in their disposition to say, 'Don't stop now, Granny. Tell us another story. Tell us the one about the ogre who ate up the Sunday school superintendent.'"

Another journalist, Frederick R. Barkley, feature writer for the New York Times, describes this method in actual operation, and also Mr. Dies' reaction when the witnesses refused to cooperate by "yessing" the investigator:

"What conclusions the people out in the country are reaching from the widely publicized testimony is puzzling many observers here. Have the committee's many ineptitudes and its unquestioning acceptance of the most fantastic tales wholly discredited it? Or is the public taking all the stories told it as gospel truth?"

Luther A. Huston, likewise writing in the New York Times, summarizes the work of the committee in the early stages of the investigation, thus:

"During a week of torrid testimony in torrid weather, a procession of witnesses ***** pinned the red badge of Moscow on the bosoms of a host of labor leaders, placed Communist sympathizers not only in the legion of the New Deal, but in the staid ranks of the Grand Old Party, hinted that Stalin's minions were trying to corrupt the church, attributed Communist affiliations and sympathy to many organizations, hitherto designated as patriotic or educational, and pointed scolding fingers at persons who gave money to buy ambulances for wounded Spanish Loyalists.
***** "

"At no time in the testimony was a definition given of Communism or a Communist. Some of the witnesses left the impression on critical observers that their definition of Communism was any program that opposed theirs, and a Communist was anyone whose opinion differed from their own."

Arthur Krock, Washington correspondent of the conservative New York Times, and himself critical of the New Deal, wrote:

Mr. Dies, like Representatives Fish and Dickstein, is a foreign propaganda bloodhound. But he goes further than even Mr. Fish and leaves Mr. Dickstein at the post, in finding links between foreign ideologies and radical movements on the left fringe of the New Deal. ***** Mr. Sheppard, Chairman of the Senatorial Committee investigating campaign activities is merely after facts he was instructed to obtain. But Mr. Dies was from the very first suspected of being after unilateral evidence to support a preconception."

EDITORIAL VIEWS ON THE DIES COMMITTEE

Newspapers of both major parties and of all shades of opinion, conservative and liberal alike, are agreed in their views of the Dies Committee. A few representative views follow:

The New York Herald-Tribune, leading conservative Republican organ and critic of the Roosevelt Administration, writes:

***** the country should be warned against the danger of spying a Communist under every bush."

"Let us realize, for instance, that Mr. Frey is a special pleader and that his object is to discredit the C.I.O. When, therefore, he says that the C.I.O. is in the grip of the Communists his assertion should be taken with several grains of salt."

And, in another editorial, this newspaper asks rhetorically:

"Are William Allen White, Henry Nobel McCracken, a Bishop of the Methodist Church and the former Governor of New Jersey, among others of like standing, dense enough to become the 'stooges' of Stalin? There must be a catch somewhere.

"The catch, we believe, appears in the assumption that because Communists ally themselves with a liberal cause they necessarily capture it."

The New York Times, Democratic and critical of the New Deal, in its restrained way, pokes fun at the committee, thus:

"One gathers from some of the testimony given before the House Committee on un-American Activities that it is now possible to be a Communist without knowing it. One may think he is merely working for peace and democracy, or against war and fascism, but in the background, if one takes this testimony at its face value, is the sinister figure of Stalin and the GPU."

Clear across the continent, the Portland Oregonian says:

"The Dies Committee listens to the fanatical Dr. J. B. Matthews charging that Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt herself is a dupe of the Communists. It passes this abnormal suspicion along to the nation *****

"To accuse this bountiful and warmhearted first lady of being manipulated from Moscow is an affront of common sense and good taste."

The Baltimore Sun, critic and opponent of the New Deal, declares Secretary of Labor Perkins

"is on firm ground *** in her refusal to deport C.I.O. Leader Harry Bridges on the ground that he is a Communist, as Representative Martin Dies demanded."

The Sun continues:

"There is such a thing as sedition and it is fairly defined by law; but this committee is not investigating sedition, it is investigating 'un-American' activities ****"

"The inevitable implication is that there is such a thing as an American activity, which can be defined and recognized."

"This is flat nonsense**** The investigation was not limited to sedition for a coherent, if not creditable, reason. Some of its proponents wished to annoy people whom they dislike; but these people are not guilty of sedition, and the proponents of the inquiry knew it. That is the only intelligible explanation of the meaningless term, 'un-American.' Under such a term anything can be dragged in."

Another newspaper, the Walla Walla Morning Union, calls attention to the committee's failure to investigate certain other and really subversive organizations. It says:

"Instead of running after the Methodist Federation for Social Service, the League of Women Shoppers and the Milk Consumers' Protective Committee, the Dies group could have performed a real service by investigating such definitely un-American groups as the Silver Shirts, Knights of the White Camelia, Order of Black Shirts and Dr. Winrod's fanatical following."

The New York Daily News summarizing the work of the committee and commenting thereon editorially, says:

"Up to now, the Dies committee has smeared the President of the United States and his wife with suspicions of having aided and abetted Communism by making friendly gestures at the World Youth Congress; has hung a Red label on poor little Shirley Temple, among other movie stars; and now wants the help of the G-Men in digging up more smear stuff."

The New York Post calls attention to some of the omissions of Mr. Dies:

"The committee still hasn't explained why it refused to question three German spy suspects discovered in the Brooklyn Navy Yard by one of its investigators.

"The committee still hasn't explained why it hired a special investigator with an alleged strike-breaking and pro-Nazi past to do its Administration-smearing.

"The committee still has to show any signs of interest in Italian Fascist propaganda in this country."

A brief editorial in the New York World-Telegram is characteristic of the light in which the Dies Committee is viewed by the press:

"Chairman Dies 'indicated the committee may go to Hollywood to dig into the charges...'

"What could be sweeter than an expedition to that place of glamour and lovely individualism -- at government expense?"

The Dies Committee fares no better at the hands of the weekly press, both conservative and liberal. Mr. Anderson, already quoted, writing in The Nation, summarized his impressions of its activities:

"Thus far the committee has devoted itself mainly to the following: (1) attacking the only form of labor organization which the industrialists have been unable to tame; (2) smearing the Senate Civil Liberties Committee, as a means of disparaging the value of civil liberties in this country; (3) broadcasting scandal against the legitimate government of Spain, to appease American resentment over the German-Italian invasion of that country; (4) trying to soften American horror over the anti-Jewish atrocities in Germany by circulating the intimation that they were provoked by a 'Jewish boycott' in this country; (5) smearing a list of New Deal officials who are on record in favor of peace and democracy. By what method does the committee strive to achieve these ends? By applying the epithets 'communist' and 'communism' to every person and every principle which it hopes to discredit*****"

In another issue of The Nation, he addresses a question to Chairman Dies -- a question which has not been answered:

"After the resolution authorizing the Dies investigation was adopted, but before the personnel of the committee was announced, did Dies seek to persuade another member of the House to serve, telling him, 'This is going to be a swell committee -- there won't be a Jew on it.'?"

Commenting editorially on the performances of the committee, The Nation says that, despite some of its farcical performances, it is taking the course "calculated to unite the various separate strands of fascist feeling into a single design -- the sustained anti-communist campaign."

And then the editorial concludes with the warning:

"America has had during the past five years a whole series of little regional dictators and sporadic regional fascist outbreaks. But, geographically isolated, muffled by intra-group quarrels, the flames have flared up only to die down again. The one thing, we know, on which the divided incipient fascist groups in Italy and Germany finally united was anti-communism and anti-trade unionism. De te, fabula."

Commonweal, the Catholic Weekly, writes:

"The Dies Committee is not our ideal of a judicial organization. The President's attack was pretty cogent as well as very stimulating. **** And the committee's greatest injustice has very likely been to Governor Murphy, a political leader we feel confident has done more to keep communism away than all the Hagues, Merriams and Dies in the country."

The New World, official organ of the Chicago Diocese of the Catholic Church, declared on Dec. 2, 1938:

"Perhaps Mr. Dies looks on the results of the recent election as a mandate for him to become the fascist dictator of the United States. Clearer and clearer become the hands of Dr. Wirt, the Liberty League, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the National Association of Manufacturers, as the manipulators of the strings that make the puppets of the Dies Committee live and move and have their being. All Mr. Dies asks is that the New Deal will now please lie down and die and he will cease firing. But the people of the U.S. are not of the same mind. . . . If it is really a committee to investigate 'un-American activities,' it really should begin with itself and the first witness should be the un-American Mr. Dies himself."

The weekly, Time, with accustomed terseness, sums up the general opinion:

"To his investigation of un-American activities, Mr. Dies has brought principally a \$25,000. appropriation, a willingness (common to Congressional ferrets) to hear what he believes, a succession of renegade leftists, ex-union officers and members turned tale-bearers, avowed spies, patriotic citizens bursting with information about the Reds."

To this virtually unanimous press condemnation, there is one notable exception -- the Hearst press, which, as might be expected, adopts Mr. Dies, his methods and his revelations as its own. In the New York Journal-American, it is said:

"In its public hearings at Washington, the Dies Committee performed a memorable service by dragging into the fullest light of day the secret and sinister machinations of Russian Communism in the United States. And, in so doing, the Committee has presented to America complete confirmation of what the Hearst newspapers have been saying continually ever since these newspapers understood, a few years, to awaken the people to the increasing menace of this Moscow-directed conspiracy against our free institutions....Nobody can any longer seriously deny that the screen is tainted with Communism."

Mr. Hearst, his journalistic methods and code of political morality, are so well known to the American people, that approval from him is not generally regarded as an accolade. What Professor Charles A. Beard said of him years ago represents the judgment of decent men:

"I have never found one single person who for talent and character commands the respect of the American people, who has not agreed with me that William Randolph Hearst has pandered to depraved tastes and has been an enemy of everything that is noblest and best in our American traditions * * * There is not a cesspool of vice and crime which he has not raked and exploited for money-making purposes."