

# How Dies Was Born

## A Comedy of Manners

ROBERT TERRALL

WHEN the first session of the 76th Congress of the United States is solemnly brought to order at noon on January 3, one of the pieces of literature which congressmen will presumably have read will be a little pamphlet of perhaps seventy-five pages entitled *Report of the Special House Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities*.

Because of the hearty cooperation of the nation's press during the last seven months, the conclusions of this particular committee will already be well known. The committee will ask for more money to bring out some more appalling "facts." To be precise, it would like \$100,000. That would permit it to go on at its present rate, if organizations like the Associated Farmers and the Republican Party of Minnesota continue to be kind, till the first of May 1941.

No liberal, progressive, trade-unionist, New-Dealer, farmer, writer, Jew, Catholic, or simple wage-earning citizen can look on that prospect with equanimity. There will be a debate in Congress when Mr. Dies, the committee's chairman, asks for his \$100,000. It will probably not resemble the debate last May 26 when Mr. Dies finally succeeded in insinuating Resolution 282 out of the Rules Committee onto the floor. Read the account of that debate in the *Congressional Record*, keeping in mind what you know of the subsequent activities of Mr. Dies' committee—it makes a neat little comedy of manners, which might as well have taken place in *Woodstock*. It brings out what no one has ever had reason to doubt—that Mr. Dies is as slippery, as abject, as unscrupulous, as dishonorable, as vicious as his own witnesses.

Now, there is nothing set and formal about a debate in the House of Representatives. Each speech is like a movie designed for continuous performance: the burden must be repeated every now and then for the benefit of people who have just come in. The thirty-eight hottest opponents of Mr. Dies' resolution, the group referred to derisively in newspaper headlines as the Young Turks, were all set. Mr. Maverick of Texas was to get first crack. Not for a while, however, for after a short parliamentary fuss it was determined that Mr. Dies should have control of one hour of the debate and Mr. Taylor should have control of the other. Neither of the gentlemen liked Mr. Maverick.

Mr. Dies yielded himself ten minutes, and there was a noticeable movement towards the exits. He began disarmingly. There had been much talk in the sensational press about

certain activities of the Nazi Bunds, certain small armings of citizens, certain heilings of Hitler, and so forth; but, said Mr. Dies, with perhaps a slight tendency toward understatement, "The impression which has been created in some quarters that this investigation is directed at the German-American people is unfounded." He had the greatest respect for the German-American people. His own mother—he paused a minute, for he had begun life as an elocution teacher, and he was not one to slip up on any small sentimental effect—his own mother was of German descent. "This investigation," he said, "is not directed at any race, for we all live in America, peoples of all races and all creeds."

That was the way he talked all the time. He referred to people of other races largely from force of habit. His father before him had been a member of Congress; he had helped draft the first piece of legislation restricting immigration. When Martin was growing up he had known that he, too, might some day get the chance to restrict immigration, and when he went to Congress from his decent little law practice in Orange, Tex. (pop. 7,913), he got himself put on the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, and introduced a half-dozen bills every session marked, "Aliens, for the deportation of certain," or "Immigration, to further restrict." He never did anything else, except to agitate for a PWA bridge across Lake Sabine, which happened to be in his district, and a little relief for the East Texas oil field, which was in his district too. That was why he was in Washington, after all.

He assured the House that if he had anything to do with this investigation—he might not be picked, you know (cooly)—"it would in no sense be an effort to abridge the undisputed right of every citizen of the United States to express his honest convictions and enjoy freedom of speech. I am not one of those who are inclined to be alarmists. I am not inclined to look under every bed for a Communist, but I can say to this House that there is in my possession a mass of information showing the establishment and operation of some thirty-two Nazi camps in the United States, that all of these camps have been paid for, that they claim a total membership of 480,000, that they assemble in these camps, and I have seen photographs that have been furnished from various sources showing the fact that in these camps men are marching and saluting the swastika, if that is the proper word for it."

The Democratic member at the next desk

whispered that that was indeed the proper word for it, and Mr. Johnson of Minnesota rose to inquire why, if such a situation as the gentleman described did, in fact, exist, he was not for the Voorhis bill, which made private armies illegal. The gentleman from Texas was sorry, he had not heard of the Voorhis bill. Mr. Johnson asked why he did not recommend that the Department of Justice proceed immediately against the Bunds instead of spending seven months on an investigation of what everybody knew already. Mr. Dies' answer was as follows:

"I care not what the gentleman's views are, I care not what his economic or political or religious views are, and I respect every man in this House who believes in his views, but I do believe that every man's right to express those views should be safeguarded."

Mr. Johnson sat down, stunned.

Mr. Crawford of Michigan said he was interested in what the gentleman had said about Communists under his bed, because he, Mr. Crawford, had listened to a speech by Earl Browder the night before on the radio and, "I suggest," said Mr. Crawford, "if the gentleman did not hear it, that he move heaven and earth to get a copy of it, because it was a hair-raiser." (Mr. Browder, as usual, spoke in support of New Deal legislation and the labor unions.) "I thank the gentleman," said Mr. Dies.

Mr. Keller of Illinois asked if maybe the House hadn't investigated the subject enough in the past few years. Said Mr. Dies, "Let me say to the gentleman that I believe all depends on the way the committee is handled. I can conceive that a committee constituted or composed of men whose object it is to gain publicity, or whose object it is to arouse hatred against some race or creed, or do things of that sort, might do more harm than good." Having made that admission, he stopped to consider. "On the other hand," he said, "investigations have a useful purpose. The other body" (referring wistfully to the Senate) "creates committees constantly. . . ."

Mr. Cochran of Missouri asked how much Mr. Dies was going to ask from the Committee on Accounts for his investigation. Mr. Dies said he didn't know. Mr. Cochran said he did so, too.

Mr. Stefan of Nebraska was afraid that the committee might inflame the American people. Mr. Dies repeated: "There is no one who detests more sincerely than I any attempt to inflame the American people." "I hope," said Mr. Stefan gloomily, "the gentleman will carry that attitude throughout the investigation."

Mr. Dies then incorporated into the *Record* a number of endorsements of his resolution by the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, American League for Peace and Democracy (he didn't know then what he knows now, that it is a sinister organization whose title means what it says), the New Jersey CIO (evidently under the impression that Mr. Dies might regard Mayor Hague as slightly

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un-American), the International Workers Order, the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, Massachusetts Non-Partisan League, International Typographical Union. Most of these organizations were obviously under the impression that they were endorsing a resolution to investigate Nazi activities. Mr. Dies could not have known what he was doing. The American League! The International Workers Order! His own committee has frequently proved, using endorsements of organizations not a bit more compromising, that various prominent individuals were Reds. Is the Dies committee composed, then, of fellow travelers? Well, maybe he knew perfectly well what he was doing.

Mr. Taylor of Tennessee took the floor. He is one of those old-time Southern orators whose stuff looks very funny written down. "The time has come," he said, "when we must not only investigate subversive influences and un-American activities now rampant in the United States but we must proceed to arrest and throttle them if our boasted democracy is to continue. Any man or woman who would hoist any other flag than Old Glory or preach any other ism except Americanism is not only unworthy of American citizenship, they are not even entitled to temporary residence in this land of the free and home of the brave." That is perhaps about enough of Mr. Taylor. You have heard the speech before. He spoke at length about the Nazis and briefly about the Communists.

"Mr. Speaker, a few days ago, on the Madison Square Roof Garden" (he had never spent much time in New York) "eighteen thousand militant Communists assembled, denounced and advocated the overthrow of this republic. Communist radicals recently for the second time had the unmitigated audacity and depravity to desecrate that hallowed shrine sacred to every red-blooded American—

Plymouth Rock—by enveloping it in red paint. The miserable wretches who committed this dastardly deed ought to be hunted down like rattlesnakes and kicked out of the country." [Applause.] It is not likely that Mr. Taylor, like Mr. Dies, sticks in his own stage directions when the *Record* comes round to him for editing before it is printed. He plays for applause.

Mr. Knutson asked about the McCormack committee of 1935—what had it done? (It had taken the direct testimony of Earl Browder, revealed that Carl Byoir & Associates were handling the Nazi Bunds' public relations, and generally observed the rules of evidence surprisingly well.) "I am sure," said Mr. Taylor, "that the investigation had the direct effect to retard the growth and activity of these movements for a while, but as a result of an apparent lethargy of interest in patriotism . . ." in short, it was time for another investigation.

Mr. Dies thought there were five million aliens in the United States illegally. Well, well—he himself didn't think there were more than three million. They were the riffraff of Europe, however, and he regretted that he had to blame the unhappy situation mostly on the policies of Miss Frances Perkins. Take the case of Harry Bridges, for example. Notorious.

Having given the members an intimation of what he would investigate if he were named to the committee (but he had been on the McCormack committee and the general feeling was that he ought to step aside and give somebody else a chance), Mr. Taylor sat down and Mr. Maverick got up.

"Bear in mind," said Mr. Maverick, "this is to investigate Nazis, not Communists; all of the agitation, all the talk has been against the German-American Bund."

Even Mr. Taylor had appeared agitated when he spoke about the Nazis. "I believe that this is the entering wedge of religious persecution—not of Nazis, but of Jews. It didn't seem very logical at the time. Mr. Dies had said that there were half a million members of the Bund, one of whom had advocated the assassination of President Roosevelt. "Personally, I think it better to refrain from talking about the assassination of the President . . ." Mr. Maverick said.

Would an investigation, he continued, take away the title of a single Nazi camp?—"not under our Constitution." There was plenty of legislation before the House already. Actually the Voorhis bill that had been spoken of was having trouble because some of the members feared it might make illegal the little private armies of corporations as well as of the Nazi camps. Well, that could be fixed up. "There is no use kidding the public, much less ourselves, for we know enough now to pass the necessary legislation to cover the situation fully. But what are we doing? We are passing the buck. We are coming in here and making pompous patriotic speeches, 'Oh, how we love the flag! Oh, how we love America!' And then we are going to traipse out of Con-

gress, doing nothing. The American people are going to laugh at us and say, 'What did you do for us?' 'Oh, man,' we can answer, 'we fixed you up. We passed a resolution to investigate un-American activities.' The flash-bulb boys and the photographers will rush back and forth, and there will be a lot of sweating and oratory about the flag.

"The only reason for our investigating will be to go around here and scare the people with exciting stories, making them suspicious of their fellow Americans, which will get the committee members headlines in the papers—in other words, the motto will be, 'Feed the people headlines instead of groceries and jobs.'"

Why not investigate the problems of the South? Why not investigate unemployment? Mr. Johnson of Minnesota said that the resolution was so sweeping "that they could investigate Old Faithful geyser in Yellowstone National Park"—but of course not the problems of the South or unemployment.

Said Mr. Maverick: "We have had one Republican investigation that caused some furor, and that was the Fish investigation; and then we had the Democratic one by Mr. McCormack. I think we have had about a 50-50 proposition on these foolish things. It is a mania—it comes every now and then, about every three or four years."

Mr. Taylor yielded six minutes to Mr. Thomas of New Jersey and Mr. Thomas spoke for four minutes about the Nazi camp at Nordlund, N. J., how awful it was, how much it ought to be investigated (it has not, of course, been investigated), one minute and a half about "the millions of dollars of the taxpayers' money our present national government is spending just to perpetuate the bureaucrats in office," and one quick half-minute about the Communists.

Mr. Boileau of Wisconsin observed, "I do not know whether the gentleman from New Jersey is going to be a member of this committee" (he was going to be indeed), "but if he is you will have from him an effort to investigate the New Deal, as he claims it to be un-American. [Applause.] And then my good friend from Texas" (meaning Mr. Dies) "showed here the other day that he thinks that those of us who advocated the Wages-and-Hours Bill are un-American. Knowing the gentleman from Texas to be a very high type of gentleman and a great American patriot" (please excuse Mr. Boileau; he is simply obeying the rules), "if he conscientiously and honestly believes that the Wages-and-Hours Bill is un-American, he will be fighting to see whether or not the AFL, the CIO, and other organizations—yes, and whether or not some members of Congress who advocated the Wages-and-Hours Bill—were not paying their obligations to some un-American organization."

Mr. Coffey of Washington, with the broken-winded courtesy required of even liberal members of Congress, spoke of ". . . the genial and capable gentleman from



Martin Dies

Charles Martin

Texas." Then: "Nevertheless, there are those of us who like to denominate ourselves as more or less liberal who believe that this is a disguise for a smelling expedition aimed at liberal organizations in the United States. My God! The whole nation is crying out for succor in its distress! What are we doing to promote Americanism in the United States? Americanism is an abused word. It is as abused as the word Love in the United States. . . ."

Mr. Maverick: "This would put the Democratic Party in a silly position, for it looks like we are going to be investigated ourselves. . . ."

Mr. McCormack: "You know when one calls a man a Red-baiter he can call someone else a Red-lover. I simply refer to this so some of our friends who may have a tendency to enter into the field of personalities may realize in the future that when they open the issue the other fellow has a chance to say something in return."

Mr. Maverick: "Does not the gentleman think that when we do not say anything about him it is a little mean in a way for him to say we have bad intentions?"

Mr. McCormack (pathetically): "We received thousands of editorial comments, and never one editorial comment of an adverse nature. . . ."

Mr. O'Malley of Wisconsin said, "Mr. Speaker, I am overwhelmed with the generosity accorded those in disagreement with this resolution in the matter of time—they cannot get any. I fear the committee will be as arbitrary as the conduct displayed today." (Mr. O'Malley was wrong. Mr. Dies, naturally, was not as sure of himself in Congress as he was going to be on his committee. But he had a sense of prophecy.) "Apparently," he said, "the open season on damn foolishness has begun. . . ."

Mr. Cochran was impatient with the way the debate was going. "Some newspapers, always critical, will make it appear, if the resolution is defeated, that the House of Representatives has declined to investigate un-American activities. I do not want to be accused of refusing to vote for legislation to investigate un-American activities." That wasn't the important thing. He was on the Committee on Accounts; how much, for God's sake, was Mr. Dies going to ask for his committee? Mr. Dies told the gentleman again that he didn't know. Mr. Cochran said that he knew perfectly well; he had in his possession a resolution for appropriation which he would drop in the hopper the moment Resolution 282 passed. *How much was he going to ask?* Mr. Dies wouldn't tell him.

Mr. Eberharter of Pennsylvania: "I have faith and confidence in our Speaker that he will appoint as members of this investigating committee men of a character and caliber who will hold this investigation within bounds." Speaker Bankhead of Alabama at this point may or may not have snickered up his sleeve.

Mr. Dies and Mr. Taylor, with all their impartiality, had unquestionably saved the remaining minutes of their time for the right people. Mr. Ford of California: "Mr. Speaker, I do not care what these other nations have in the way of a government. That is their business. But I do not want them to try to attempt to inaugurate it in our own country [applause] and I am not going to have it."

Mr. Robson of Kentucky: "We have no Communists or Nazis in my congressional district. Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini have no appeal for the citizens of my district." The gentleman's district is Harlan County.

Well, up to now the speakers have all denounced the Nazis and most of them have thrown in a small denunciation of Communism because they thought it was expected of them. All along, the opponents of the resolution have known it was going to pass, the majority of the House, like Mr. Cochran, being afraid to vote against it because of the newspapers. The Nazi camps had even been exposed by *March of Time* — why waste the country's money? It was left to the last speaker to bring out the unreality of the whole debate—Mr. O'Connor of New York. It appeared that Mr. O'Connor didn't think the investigation was aimed at the Nazi camps at all.

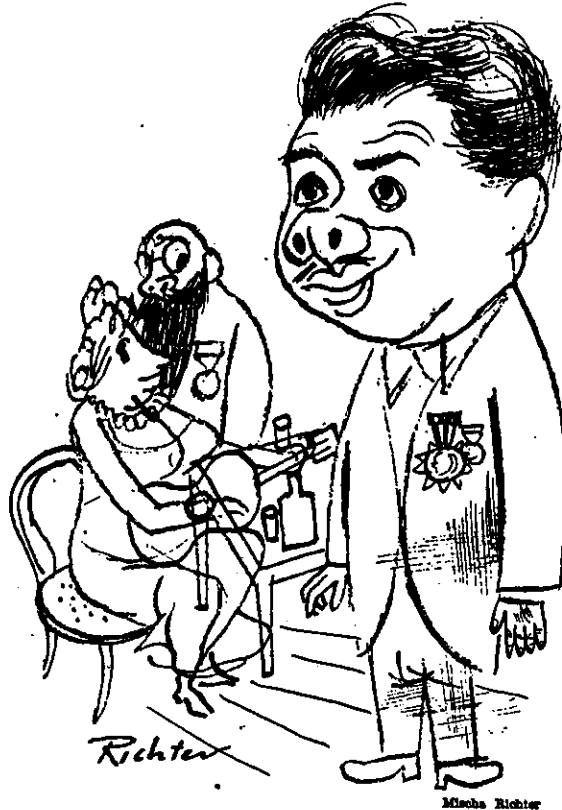
Mr. O'Connor (with a heavy sense of doom): "The allies of the Communists have joined forces. Let me read some extracts

from a letter just received by me today: 'Congressman John J. O'Connor, etc., etc., I have deposited affidavits accumulated during two years that I have been studying Communism from the inside. Mail is no longer safe, as there is a Communist within every New York post office. In the office or at the phone of every large industry there is a Communist spy. No one is safe on WPA in New York who does not join the CP. Under protection I will go before Congress and testify to the nefarious plans of Communism toward America.' Do the accents sound familiar? Does it conjure up a picture of the Dies committee nodding sagely as some ten thousand pages of testimony on the same moral and factual plane, without question or contradiction, are inserted in the record and spread on five hundred front pages? The letter went on. Mr. O'Connor, with a magnificent disregard of the rules of evidence, did not tell the House who had written it.

"All this," said Mr. O'Connor, and even he was feeling prophetic, "is a great compliment to me. If ever I were defeated for public office it is my solemn wish that I go down to defeat fighting the Communists. . . ."

And yet: "We just *must* stop it now. Why, Mr. Speaker, I saw fifty thousand people march through our streets with the red flags of Communism. They were of all nations and all colors! Let us save this country—and I am serious—let us save it from this horde of radicals, this horde of Communists, before the hour becomes too late." [Applause.]

The two hours were almost up. There was some trouble about whether Mr. Dies could accept the amendments he wanted without allowing a vote on the others, and the Chair was of the opinion that he could. Mr. Dies moved the previous question, Mr. Boileau demanded a division, and there were 191 ayes, 41 noes. Mr. Boileau asked for the yeas and nays. The yeas and nays were refused. The question was then on the adoption of the resolution, the resolution was adopted and a motion to reconsider was laid on the table; as Mr. Dies went off up the aisle, flushed and happy, the House moved on to consideration of a bill permitting foreign articles to be admitted without tariff for exhibition at the World Poultry Congress.



"Grand Duke Vladimir is a new man since Hitler gave him the Ukraine."