

WITH NEW GRANT, DIES PLANS 'REAL' INQUIRY

Fairness Pledged When Controversial Committee Renews Its Hearings On Un-American Activities

Not since Feb 12/39

By FREDERICK R. BARKLEY

WASHINGTON, Feb. 11.—When the House last week, by the vote of 344 to 35, gave the so-called Dies committee 100,000 and ordered it to go ahead for another full year with its inquiry into un-American activities it climaxed one of the most remarkable episodes in Congressional history.

The committee originally was created last May with an appropriation of \$25,000, and ordered to make a final report at the beginning of the present Congress, which it did. Its legal life ended at 12 o'clock noon on Jan. 3 along with that of the Congress which created it.

The committee report admitted that criticism and ridicule of the committee had been widespread. While it did not refer to President Roosevelt's indictment of its "flagrantly unfair and un-American attempts to influence an election" (against Frank Murphy, then Governor of Michigan) it did note that it had been the butt of similar attacks by Secretaries Ickes and Perkins, as well as numerous other high-ranking government officials and "radical" writers.

It admitted also, at least by inference, a failure to operate under "a strictly nonpartisan attitude and policy" in a section of the report which had to be added as the price of the signatures of two members who had previously publicly criticized it for such alleged failure. And the committee chairman, Representative Martin Dies of Texas, has publicly admitted that the investigation was not a "good" one, that "screwball witnesses" were heard and that some decent Americans may have been unfairly "smeared."

Request for Renewal

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committee was often unsubstantiated or discredited, it did show, shorn of its irrelevancies, an apparent spread of communistic sympathies and of Communist party activity in the country, largely through so-called "front" organizations; and an active Nazi movement which did not appear to be making much headway except among some German-Americans. It showed Communist infiltration into labor, social, liberal and even church organizations, and it showed, furthermore, the existence of a large number of organizations, mostly apparently one-man "paper" outfits, which were, nevertheless, spreading a vast amount of racial propaganda.

But the inquiry, the committee held, "only scratched the surface." It did not go far enough, it was asserted, to justify recommending legislation to Congress, which would require two years' more probing, including several months to consider what legislation to recommend.

Most of Plea Granted

And because of the fears or curiosity aroused throughout the country, Mr. Dies got most of what he asked for. The leaders did manage to cut the extension of life down to a year, so that the committee will at least not be functioning on its present life-lease in the next national campaign. They also reduced the amount asked to \$100,000 and eliminated the second request for departmental aid; the committee must go ahead solely on its own funds. Furthermore, they have put on the committee a third New Dealer, and an ardent one, Representative Voorhis of California, to fill a vacancy. To this Mr. Dies had assented in advance.

And now, the Texan says, he is going to conduct a "real investigation," if the other committee members agree to his plans. These involve hiring two or three "good lawyers" and ten or twelve expert investigators, whom he hopes to re-

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fact was, however, that, as the party leaders soon learned from returning members, the Dies exposures had caught the imagination of the country. The Gallup poll reported that 74 per cent of those questioned favored continuing the inquiry. The party leaders found an almost unanimous sentiment among members that it would be politically unsafe for them to vote contrary, even if they had little respect for what the committee had done and less for how it had done it.

Admitting the soundness of many of the attacks on the committee, Mr. Dies had a plausible answer. He insisted on the impossibility of making a thorough and high-grade investigation with the sum the committee had had available. He pointed to the refusal of Government departments and agencies to lend investigators and clerks as had been done for other committees, like the La Follette Civil Liberties inquiry. He referred to "misrepresentations" made against the committee.

Administration's Stand

Why Administration leaders took the position they did toward the committee never has been authoritatively explained. In some quarters it is suggested the reason was a suspicion that Mr. Dies planned to operate under the inspiration of Vice President Garner, a fellow-Texan, in an effort to discredit leftist elements in the party. The Congressman denies this in toto.

Elsewhere the idea is advanced that the New Deal would have been antagonistic to such an inquiry under any one's direction because of fear that it might expose communistic—or, probably more exactly, socialistic—infiltrations into the Administration.

A third conclusion has been that the inquiry was feared because it might expose (as it did) Communist infiltration into some of the constituent unions of the C. I. O., to which the Administration was felt to be obligated because of its political and financial support in 1936.

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Furthermore, he asserts, he hopes the committee will revert to his original plan of questioning all witnesses in executive sessions.

"Of course, the public may want open hearings," the chairman added. "We'll have to feel our way. But we are going to try to be absolutely fair, to avoid smearing any one."

"I think what the public wants is an accurate picture. We've got a good outline now, and the thing to do is to fill it in. There are 300 or 400 organizations which should be probed and I'd like to start on them. But it will be a month or two before we can get to work. The committee hasn't met and we haven't got the money yet, and we didn't get enough, either. We'll have to ask for more before Summer."

"And I don't think the department heads or the columnists are going to open their mouths about us this time," Mr. Dies concluded triumphantly. "We've proved this job should be done."