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11/29/39

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Properly Excused

The Dies committee, very wisely, has decided not to ask Mrs. Roosevelt to testify before it. Though the first lady of the land has consistently lent the protection of her patronage to Communist-controlled organizations, like the Workers' Alliance and the American Youth Congress, she has done so with such an obviously ingenuous desire for fair play and the triumph of democratic ideals that not the remotest suspicion of her knowledge of or participation in the Stalinist intrigue attaches to her. As Benjamin Stolberg said of her in his yesterday's article, "she is the only completely innocent front the Communist party has ever had."

So why quiz the gallant lady? From time to time we have had occasion in these columns to support her championship of the underdog of radical belief or utterance against the impulse to stifle him. We have agreed with Mrs. Roosevelt that freedom of conscience and belief was essential to the preservation of American institutions. We still agree with her in this respect while pointing out that she is plainly no judge whatever of the abuses to which her principles have been put by the conspirators who have found refuge under her wing. And nothing the Dies committee might elicit from her on the witness stand would add to its enlightenment or hers. Her opinion of the committee conceivably parallels that of her husband, which is that it is engaged in a witch hunt against New Deal sympathizers.

As a matter of fact, its task is to reduce to a hard-boiled factual basis the charge that the very Americans whom Mrs. Roosevelt has been so prone to defend have been made suckers of by a foreign dictator. Under the circumstances she should be its last witness.