

(Not printed at Government expense)



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 77th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

The Dies Committee

SPEECH

OF

HON. THOMAS H. ELIOT

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 18, 1942

Mr. ELIOT of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, about a year ago I spoke here in the House about the procedure of the special House Committee on Un-American Activities. I pointed out that while the committee's purposes might be worth while the committee itself all too often acted irresponsibly. Investigations were frequently undertaken and announcements made, I said, without any vote by the committee, without any discussion, without even any meeting. Such a method of doing things, it seemed to me, was rash and reckless in a time of national danger.

Now the national danger is far greater, and within a few days a resolution will come before the House to extend once again the life of the Dies committee. We will have a chance to repudiate that committee's way of doing things—to prove that we have the courage to court inevitable abuse and misunderstanding by doing an honest job for the good of the country. A vote against the Dies committee is not a vote for un-American activities, fascism, or communism. Far from it. A vote against the Dies committee is a vote for responsible government. It is a refusal to permit any longer the course of heedless folly which, regardless of the committee's intentions, divides the Nation and plays into the hands of our enemies.

When I say "plays into the hands of our enemies," I mean just that. Did you read the President's remarks at his press conference yesterday about the dangerous "Cliveden set" here in Washington that seems more interested in creating conflict between us and Russia than in beating the Axis? Read what the President said; you know it is all too true. And then turn, if you will, to the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD of January 28. There you will find a speech by the gentleman from Texas [Mr. DIES] raking up old hatreds and implying that our most dangerous enemy today, our most sin-

ister fifth column, is Russian and not German or Japanese. Read, too, and reread many times, the great reply made that day by another gentleman from Texas [Mr. SUMNERS]. After Mr. DIES had spoken, Mr. SUMNERS reminded us, and I quote him:

We must not knowingly insult any nation which is now engaged in this war as an ally of our own.

And he said that "if we are seeking to kick Russia, if that is what we are trying to do," then there is "mighty good sense" in the proposals of Mr. DIES.

That is only a part of the picture. There is another part of it which is equally black and which fits in perfectly.

Last week I placed in the RECORD a letter written by the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission to the gentleman from Texas [Mr. DIES]. I urge you to read that letter, which will be found on page A559 of the RECORD. Summarized, the letter states that the chairman of the Dies committee has been frequently and favorably quoted on Axis propaganda broadcasts beamed to this hemisphere.

Defenders of the committee may urge that the report about Axis broadcasts was made by a subversive employee. Well, the employee in question was not employed by the F. C. C. when the report was made; and the Dies committee's definition of "subversive" is so fantastic as to defy belief.

Listen to me for a moment while I tell you what the Dies committee calls un-American activities. The other day there was spread in the RECORD the Dies committee file on a number of Government employees—men and women whom the committee apparently believes to be subversive and wishes to see fired. There is a column for Communist-front organizations which the suspected person is supposed to have belonged to, and there is a column for the actual subversive activity which was alleged to have been undertaken. What does the Dies committee consider are un-American activities? Here is an example taken from the committee's own files—endorsement of the American Youth Act. If you endorsed that proposed legislation, you are subversive. Among the endorsers of the American Youth Act were Warden Lawes and several Members of the House, including a member of the Dies committee itself. Subversive fellows, these. And yet the Dies committee has blacklisted people and called them un-American because they joined Warden Lawes and our col-

leagues here in behalf of this proposed legislation.

And what does the gentleman from Texas call an un-American or Communist-front organization? Let me give you an example. William E. Dodd, Jr., according to the Dies committee, is subversive because his father—get that, his father, Ambassador Dodd, not he himself—was a member of something called the Council Against Intolerance. Here are some of the traitorous, subversive men who formed that council. Its co-chairmen were Senator Barbour, of New Jersey, George Gordon Battle, and William Allen White. Members of the council included Attorney General Biddle, Senator Bennett Clark, of Missouri, Thomas E. Dewey, Frank Gannett, Josephus Daniels, Governor Saltonstall, of Massachusetts, and the Reverend Maurice E. Sheehy, of Catholic University, who spoke over the radio under the auspices of the council. It is alarming to note, too, that in this subversive Communist-front organization—members of the council itself—were Alfred E. Smith and Senator Carter Glass, of Virginia.

How can we stand for this kind of thing? It is just silly, and it makes the House look utterly ridiculous. We are told to blacklist a man because his father served on a council with such sinister, dangerous, revolutionaries as Josephus Daniels and CARTER GLASS. We are told that an organization is a Communist front when its spokesman over a national network is the head of the department of religious education at Catholic University. When a House committee does a thing like this, insulting statesmen and clergy alike, it destroys its own value, and it should make the whole House thoroughly ashamed.

But it is worse than shameful. Seriously, it is dangerous. The Dies committee makes up lists of subversive employees like this and urges the Federal Bureau of Investigation to send its investigators out to find out more about them. I submit, Mr. Speaker, that when we are in a deadly war with dangerous enemies our Government investigators should not be sent by the Dies committee on a never-ending round of fools' errands.

And I mean fools' errands. Just take those few names that were in the RECORD the other day. One "Mary Johnson," a minor clerk, is listed, or rather blacklisted, because somebody named Mary Johnson drew a picture for a Communist paper 6 years ago. It is not the same Mary Johnson, but that does not matter

to the Dies committee. There are thousands of Mary Johnsons, but, obviously, they had better not work for the Government; the Dies committee will get them.

And while the House's special committee urges the Federal Bureau of Investigation to set its bloodhounds on the trail of Mary Johnson, the great ship *Normandie* goes up in flames and is a total loss. Did somebody once say something about putting first things first?

Then, on that list in the RECORD, there is George Saunders, of the Office of Civilian Defense. He is on the blacklist. The committee's file says that he is a Communist living in Pittsburgh. Actually the George Saunders in the Office of Civilian Defense lives in San Francisco, where he was active in the Junior Chamber of Commerce. His former professor, Senator ELBERT THOMAS of Utah, tells me he is a Roman Catholic. But our eagle-eyed committee tells the F. B. I. to track him down just the same.

And while they demand the scalp of this Catholic layman and call him a Red, do you know what is happening only a hundred miles away? George Deatherage, the frank American Fascist who used to head up the Knights of the White Camelia and who planned a Fascist coup to seize the Government, is executive engineer at an immense naval construction project right down here at Norfolk. But our alert Dies committee did not know about that; they were too busy worrying about Mary Johnson and that revolutionary organization headed by Al Smith and Governor Saltonstall and Father Sheehy.

As a matter of fact, the Dies committee has never done much about the Fascist front organizations. The chairman has said a lot about them, but the record is largely one of words, not action.

For instance, on July 16 of last year the chairman promised to make public "soon," as he put it, a document relating to fascistic, anti-Semitic groups. The document has never appeared.

On March 8 of last year he was reported to have evidence concerning a huge organization to promote Nazi ideology. There has been no mention of this since then.

Fourteen months ago he promised to expose Nazi money-raising campaigns in the United States, and said that the committee has seized records containing 220,000 names. Has anyone ever seen the names or heard of that exposure?

The Philadelphia Inquirer quotes him on November 30, 1940, as promising to reveal, "next week," a plot of the Bund to sabotage American industry. But to this day the plot remains unrevealed.

And on September 18, 1939, in a radio speech, the gentleman from Texas said he had evidence of cooperation between the Bund and some native Fascist groups, including, by the way, Mr. George Deatherage's Knights of the White Camelia. But no action by the committee followed, and the Knight of the White Camelia has turned up in a key defense job.

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I could go on with this for a long time, for the committee's record on Fascist organizations is a sorry one of big promises and little or no performance.

Now a word as to American Communists whose first loyalty inexplicably is to another country. Perhaps we should have a committee to investigate all these things. It could serve a useful purpose. Once in a while, even the Dies committee has brought to light facts that are worth knowing—most conspicuous being the financial link between the Communists and the erstwhile League for Peace and Democracy. But the committee made the huge mistake of assuming that all the members of that league, and even the people who were merely on its mailing list, knew of that secret financial link. They did not. People whose only interest was in doing something to stop the Nazis joined that organization—people, Mr. Speaker, who are no more Communist than you or I.

Why, Mr. Speaker, only last week, at a public hearing of the Rules Committee, the gentleman from Georgia [Mr. Cox] implied that A. F. Whitney was a Communist because he belonged to the League for Peace and Democracy. And who is A. F. Whitney? He has been for years the president of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, one of the best established, most loyal American workmen's organizations in our history. When the gentleman from Georgia said Mr. Whitney was "linked with Browder"—and that is what he said, I heard him say it—he was accusing not only Mr. Whitney but thousands of good Americans who belong to that organization, who know Mr. Whitney well and have elected and reelected him as their president.

Yes, the Dies committee finds a few facts now and then, but promptly loses regard for facts and indulges in what the New York Herald Tribune has described as the "unvarnished smear." Let me cite some more "unvarnished smears."

Here is a Government employee named Gauld—I never heard of him before—who is labeled un-American by the Dies committee because he was a member of a committee headed up by former Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes.

Here is a group labeled "Communist Front"—the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League. They call the Anti-Nazi League un-American. Since when was it un-American to be anti-Nazi? The Dies committee calls this Anti-Nazi League a Communist Front organization, and yet this is what somebody said about the Anti-Nazi League right here on the floor of the House:

I have personal knowledge of the league. It is a very substantial organization and is not one that is engaged in propaganda. It is a fine organization of Americans.

The Dies committee calls it a Communist Front group, but the gentleman from Massachusetts, whose remarks I have just quoted, the distinguished majority leader, JOHN W. McCORMACK, calls it a fine organization of Americans.

How long are we going to continue to put any stock whatever in the accusations of the Dies committee?

Here is another subversive group—the China Aid Council. A Government employee is put on the blacklist because he belonged to that. Well, the China Aid Council is a part of United China Relief, and the honorary chairman of United China Relief is Mr. Wendell Willkie. Are we seriously trying to prove that Mr. Willkie is some kind of a "pink"?

Finally, here is an activity which the Dies committee considers subversive. Yes; this is an activity listed in the Dies committee files and charged against United States employees as un-American—signing a petition against the Dies committee. Anybody who opposes the continuation of the Dies committee is ipso facto un-American. I need not comment on the dangerous implications of a thing like that. It is enough to point out the amazing and smug self-righteousness of the committee.

Mr. Speaker, this Dies committee has become a dangerous and expensive luxury. We make a great row about a harmless \$4,600 dancer, yet we are asked to fork over \$100,000 to perpetuate a committee that has done little good and much harm.

And when we read the record and think the thing through we know that that is the truth. Perhaps another committee could have done or would do a really helpful job in this field. But we know in our hearts that this Dies committee has a record of high-handed hearings, high-sounding promises, very little accomplishment, and endless, ridiculous, unforgivable smearing of decent and loyal Americans. They have cried "Wolf!" so heedlessly that they cannot be trusted to guard Americanism any more than the shepherd boy who cried "Wolf!" should have been trusted to guard his flock.

There is one more thing which I have time enough only to mention this afternoon. But think it over. Think over the attacks on President Roosevelt's policies by the chairman of this committee. Think of the false charges brought against the men the President and the country trust. Think of the accusation, thinly veiled, that the Dies committee could have prevented the Pearl Harbor tragedy if the President had not interfered. Think of the need for solidarity among the United Nations against our enemies. Think of these things, and remember how desperately the country needs a unified leadership, how much the President has to depend on us, how much we do depend on him.

We will be on trial when this resolution comes up next week. The easy thing, the politically safe thing, would be to let it go through. Safe for whom? Not for the country. The future is pretty dark and we would not brighten it by perpetuating a committee which is only a source of futile confusion, suspicion, absurdity, doubt, and hatred. We would simply make things worse. The Dies committee is a dangerous plaything. Our duty is not easy, but it is clear and it needs to be done.