

(Not printed at Government expense)

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD

INVESTIGATION OF UN-AMERICAN ACTIVITIES

SPEECH

OF

HON. LEE E. GEYER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, February 3, 1939

Mr. GEYER of California. Mr. Speaker, under leave to extend my remarks, I wish to insert my views on the continuation of the Dies committee's investigation into un-American activities.

The chairman of the so-called Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities has repeatedly asked the public and Members of this House to refrain from judging the work of his committee on the basis of the printed record of its hearings. This is a rather unusual request. But then the Dies committee is a rather unusual committee. The gentleman from Texas has protested that even he did not believe everything his witnesses told him. Methinks the gentleman doth protest too much. At any rate, he has never defined the precise limits of his credulity.

Members of this House have been so unkind as to make references to the preposterous charges leveled against distinguished American citizens by the Dies committee witnesses. The gentleman from Texas, apparently embarrassed to find that his colleagues actually read the record of hearings held by a committee responsible to them, has sought to embarrass them in turn by asking if they have read the committee's report. He implies that the hearings themselves may perhaps sound like the proceedings of a lunacy commission, the report on the contrary makes sense.

The gentleman from Texas has admitted that some of his witnesses were "screw balls." Which witnesses? That question is not answered in the report. Others have charged that some witnesses were criminals with recorded police histories, labor spies, politicians with a preelection ax to grind, and other unsavory characters. The gentleman from Texas has never separated the goats from the sheep among his witnesses. On the evidence of that same report, to which he directs our attention, I am forced to believe that he considers them all honorable and reliable experts.

I have not the time to question the gentleman about all of the witnesses who appeared before him, nor to ask how much credence he placed in their testimony. But there is one witness from my own State about whom I know a good deal. I would like to ask the gentleman from Texas [Mr. DIES] if he put any stock in the tall tales told by Mr. Harper Knowles? Mr. Knowles, I admit, made an impressive witness. He came to Washington at his own expense, and the gentleman from Texas may have been loathe to look a gift horse in the mouth. Mr. Knowles came supported by legal counsel, and his attorney, Ray Nimmo, backed up all of Knowles' assertions. Knowles and Nimmo together were a formidable team. But, though they initiated a choral procedure unique in congressional history, they did not depend on the spoken word alone. Knowles and Nimmo brought with them to Washington fat bound volumes of fantasy which they presented to each member of the committee. These remarkable documents added weight to the weighty remarks of client and lawyer. Together with the verbal testimony of Knowles and Nimmo, they are printed in the record.

I submit to the House that the true story of the vaudeville team of Knowles and Nimmo is not contained in their testimony, written or spoken, nor in the printed record, nor yet in the committee report. It is a story well known to the people of my district. Parts of it have crept into the magazines and newspapers of the East. It can scarcely be a secret from Chairman DIES, for it is familiar to his "ace" investigator, Eddie Sullivan.

127820—18200

The record of the hearings contains 400 pages of Knowles and Nimmo, purporting to be the views of the American Legion. The report gives every evidence that the committee swallowed the whole Knowles-Nimmo fabrication without a single grain of salt. The report, in part, says:

From the information before the committee, we feel convinced that a thorough investigation of the west coast will show that the Communists have enjoyed greater success there than in any other section of the country; that they have seized many important positions in the labor movement and are directing many labor and political activities.

I challenge the gentleman from Texas to state whether the words "information before the committee" refer in whole or in part to the testimony of Harper Knowles. I challenge him to state why, if they do not so refer, he does not come out and say so. What other "information" has the committee got on the California situation? Why has it withheld that information from the people of California and from this House? Why has it printed the bulk of Knowles' testimony if it did not believe in its validity? And are the sources of any other information the committee has in its possession as polluted as the source of the information it got from Harper Knowles?

HE CALLS ALL ELECTED DEMOCRATS IN CALIFORNIA COMMUNISTS

Here I may state in passing that he would have you believe that my presence in this House is itself "proof" that the Communists have "enjoyed great success" in California, and also that out in California the people have been duped into believing that my colleagues on this side of the aisle and the new Senator from my State, Mr. SHERIDAN DOWNEY, and Governor Olson and Lieutenant Governor Patterson are all Democrats. But, of course, we are very simple people, easily tricked by Comrade Stalin and his henchmen. Mr. Knowles knows much better. On the eve of our election last November he did his best to enlighten the California electorate. He told the Dies committee, and through its loudspeaker the people of California, that if the Democrats won Moscow would rule. Mr. Downey and Governor Olson, I believe, are merely fellow travelers. But Lieutenant Governor Patterson is put down in the Dies committee record as a card-holding Communist Party member. And so is Mr. John Clark, who masqueraded as Democratic campaign manager. If the gentleman from Texas believed what Harper Knowles told him, he is fully justified in concluding that the Communists have made great strides in California. If he does not believe it, he owes a duty to that party in which I believe he is himself still a "card-holding" member to clear up the doubts he has helped create.

The gentleman from Texas says of his report that—

None of our findings are predicated upon (exaggerated) testimony or upon opinions or hearsay.

There is evidence in this report that in one instance at least its findings are predicated on understatement, specifically on Mr. Harper Knowles' understatement. Mr. Knowles wound up his extensive harangue on the "red" menace with a couple of sentences dismissing Nazi and Fascist activities on the west coast as relatively unimportant. The committee's report, in the section dealing with the west coast, says:

Not only are the Communists active here, but to a lesser extent, the same is true of the Nazis.

At least this conclusion is not based on hearsay. It is based rather on total and willful deafness to the facts. Nazi spies have been arrested on the west coast for overt acts violating Federal statutes. Nazi instigated spread of anti-Semitic and subversive propaganda inciting to violence has resulted in arrests and preferment of charges. Mr. Knowles and Chairman DIES, who had such keen ears for hearsay rumors of what the "red" Democrats were plotting, heard nothing of all this.

The reason for Mr. Knowles' minimizing the Nazi menace on the west coast is not hard to find. Limited as it was as to funds, even the Dies committee might have found it, if it had cared to look around.

Mr. Knowles himself is American blood brother to the Nazi menace.

THE FACTS ABOUT HARPER KNOWLES

Let me tell you the story of Harper Knowles, a story you will not find in either the record nor the report of the Dies committee.

Until a short time before he appeared in Washington as a supposedly disinterested witness before the Dies committee, Harper Knowles was secretary of the Associated Farmers.

Mr. Knowles is not a farmer, nor is the Associated Farmers a farm organization. In view of what is now known of other witnesses and the groups they represented, we need not be surprised to find that the Associated Farmers is engaged in un-American activities, and that Mr. Knowles' own experiences did, indeed, qualify him as an expert on that subject.

ASSOCIATED FARMERS IN POLITICS

But Mr. Knowles' personal experiences with Associated Farmers did not, of course, enter into the story he told the Dies committee. He did not tell them that Associated Farmers is financed and controlled by the traditional enemies of California's independent farmers—by the big railroad and utility interests, by the banks and mortgage holders, and by the monopolistic processors of farm produce. Nor did he tell the Dies committee that Associated Farmers is in politics. About the time that Knowles resigned in order to conduct the Republican campaign from the temporary headquarters of the Dies committee, one of the vice presidents of the organization also took a leave of absence. This was Phillip Bancroft, Republican opponent of Senator SHERIDAN DOWNEY. Needless to say, candidate Bancroft had the full support of the organization he had served as vice president.

Associated Farmers was playing local as well as national politics in November. It helped to originate and pushed the iniquitous "labor initiative and referendum No. 1" which would have destroyed all west coast trade-unions and wiped out the constitutional rights of labor. The American Federation of Labor, no less than the C. I. O., is entitled to full credit for the defeat of this measure. A united labor movement gathered the support of the majority of middle-class people and farmers in a magnificent defense of American democracy. Initiative No. 1 was defeated, and so was the Associated Farmers' candidate for the Senate, Phillip Bancroft.

Since the Associated Farmers was organized there has been no strike in California in which it did not play an important—and bloody—part. Strikebreaking and vigilante terrorism have been its un-American weapons. In view of Chairman DIES' frequently expressed abhorrence of violence and class hatred, it is interesting that he never looked into the violence of the Associated Farmers nor listed it among his promoters of class hatred.

COLONEL SANBORN

One of the leaders and organizers of the Associated Farmers' ax-handle brigade in the Salinas lettuce strike was Col. Henry Sanborn. Sanborn is an old pal of Harper Knowles. They have worked together at labor espionage and strikebreaking in the past. Sanborn and Knowles are well known in my part of the country as fomenters of labor disputes, out of which they then made a cash profit. And the gentleman from Texas, who collaborated so obligingly with Harper Knowles in the happily unsuccessful effort to influence the California elections, is no stranger to Knowles' ex-partner, Colonel Sanborn. Sanborn is said to have been the Dies committee's first choice for the job of chief investigator of un-Americanism. It was only when even the gentleman from Texas was convinced that Sanborn's notoriety was so widespread that even the Dies committee could not hope to hide it, that Eddie Sullivan got the job. Eddie Sullivan's record has been exposed to this House by my esteemed and courageous colleague, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. KELLER). No more need be said of Colonel Sanborn than that his record is blacker than the black record of Eddie Sullivan.

127820—16200

Acting for the Associated Farmers and their senatorial candidate, Bancroft, Harper Knowles won hands down in the Dies committee hearing room and in the reactionary California newspapers. He lost at the polls.

He returned from Washington to California, and at first claimed to be working for the Dies committee. But a congressional committee less gullible than the Dies committee had business with Harper Knowles, and he found it expedient to sever his connections, if any, with Washington. Under an assumed name he rented a house in Palo Alto. I draw no inferences from this choice of a safe place in which to locate. But it may be that Knowles felt Palo Alto was all of California that Herbert Hoover had managed to save from the November revolution, and therefore a good place to settle. However that may be, his stay in that de luxe Hooverville was brief. Congressional investigators, armed with subpoenas, were hot on his trail. By the time they reached Palo Alto Knowles had flown the coop. His whereabouts are not now known. It is reported that he has grown a beard, perhaps to placate the "reds" who now rule California.

This is the man who dared to impugn the Americanism of the highest officials of my State, and by implication the Americanism of the majority who elected them to office. This is the man whose testimony is included in proceedings of which the Dies committee has the effrontery to say:

It must be emphasized that this committee is nonpartisan. It has not been deterred by partisan or political consideration from the fearless performance of its duty and functions. The committee has felt that it is its sworn duty and solemn obligation to the people of this country to focus the spotlight of publicity upon every individual and organization engaged in subversive activities regardless of politics or partisanship.

CALIFORNIANS ARE REAL AMERICANS

Mr. Speaker, I do not need to tell you what the people of my State think of the Dies committee. They spoke for themselves in the November elections. They showed that they do not regard attacks on the rights of labor as evidences of Americanism. They showed that they do not believe that those who wanted the 22-year-old injustice to Tom Mooney righted are Communists. They freed Tom Mooney and vindicated justice in America. The people of my State gave an American answer to those who tried to defeat the Democratic candidates with the Nazi cries of "Jew" and "Communist." We registered our veto of any more funds for the Dies committee when we elected the Democratic slate in California. I come here with a mandate from my people: Stop the un-American Dies committee. I am only a newcomer in this House. But I shall do my utmost to carry out that mandate. And I call upon all who cherish the principles on which this Government is founded, on all my colleagues regardless of party, to put an end to a committee which has brought disgrace upon this House.

FAVORS A REAL INVESTIGATION

In conclusion let me say, Mr. Speaker, that I favor an investigation into un-American activities. But I want a real investigation. I do not want a committee that has been guilty of character assassination to do the job. A committee that has done everything in its power to "smear" everyone and every organization that is honestly trying to find a solution to the social and economic ills that beset our bountiful land.

I want a committee that will inquire into the causes of un-Americanism. I believe that such a committee that went about the job honestly would find that the seeds of disloyalty thrive best in a people that are denied the rights that all American citizens should have. This committee would find, I believe, that to cure the disease we must strike at the cause. The solution would be a good job for all at decent wages, and a pension for our aged that is their just desert. Then when this had been done we would have put a purchasing power into the hands of the people that would make our population happy and contented, and foreign "isms" would be no more. Mr. Speaker, I cannot vote to continue the Dies committee.