

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Dies Committee

The American people are just beginning to realize how much their Constitutional democracy and their long-established liberties mean to them. The reason is, I think, that now, for the first time, we have had it brought home to us that those liberties can be lost. The enemies of American liberty and democracy are the following in the order of their importance: (1) Unemployment; (2) unnecessary and therefore cruel poverty in the midst of possible plenty; (3) hatred, fear, prejudice and intolerance and the people who breed these; (4) organizations and individuals working in our country under the direction and control of foreign powers or dictators; (5) the threat of war, and the encouragement of a war psychology.

The American people are determined to save their way of life and their constitutional democracy; they don't like dictatorship and they resent bitterly attempts on the part of anyone to foist upon them either Nazi, Fascist, or Communist dictatorship.

But a Democracy cannot use the methods of dictatorships in protecting itself against anti-democratic forces within its own body politic. Democracy cannot suppress organizations without doing violence to its own principles. It cannot put people in concentration camps nor deny them the right to express their political opinions. Every true American is thankful these things are so. But democracies do have the right and duty to find effective ways to protect their institutions and the liberties of the many against attempts by minorities to undermine them. I believe such ways can be found without violating any constitutional rights of anyone. The most effective way of all to do this is to give the people full facts about any groups which, directed and controlled by foreign agencies or powers, set about the task of methodically undermining democratic institutions. Therefore, an investigation, carefully conducted, into the work of organizations controlled and directed from abroad and devoted to foreign systems of dictatorship seems to me a necessary and proper thing. It can also be a very dangerous thing and one which can be turned to anti-democratic purposes such as the creation of hatred, fear and suspicion or an attack on labor and progressive movements generally. Only the greatest care, the greatest faithfulness to exact facts can prevent this. These are the reasons I have felt it my

duty to continue as a member of the Dies Committee even though I have wanted many times to be able to have more time for constructive work for the 130,000,000 people in America instead of spending so much of it trying to find out what is wrong with a few hundred thousand of them.

Here are the main things the Committee has brought out:

1. It has shown quite conclusively that the Communist Party of the United States is in the final analysis nothing more nor less than the agent in the United States of the Communist International and the Communist Party of Russia. Whether all of its rank and file members are fully conscious of this fact or not, the Committee has adequately demonstrated its truth. The Communist Party as now constituted has been shown to be no more an American institution than the Amtorg is an American business enterprise.

2. Likewise and with equal conclusiveness, the Committee has shown that Fritz Kuhn's German-American Bund is an American Branch of the World Nazi Movement and that there are those, both in the United States and in Europe, who hope the time will come when Kuhn can play the role of an "American Henlein." (Henlein was the Nazi leader in Czechoslovakia.) The amazing thing is that some organizations calling themselves "patriotic" have cooperated with the Bund. The Bund, of course, does not even begin to speak for the millions of fine and patriotic Americans of German descent.

3. The Committee has shown how a considerable number of organizations, such as the Silver Shirts of America, are nothing more than racketeering attempts to prey upon the prejudice and fears of well-meaning people and to prostitute the words "Christian" and "patriotism," to the sordid ends of personal gain for the self-styled Hitlerian leaders of paper organizations. It has shown a whole pattern of these "organizations," all of which attempt to stir up hatred and prejudice and fear, in precisely the same way that the Nazis used in Germany. It has shown how these organizations tried to unite in the "American Nationalist Confederation"—but without any real success. To the Committee's credit be it said that it has earned the everlasting enmity of Mr. Wm. Dudley Pelley and that its members have been sued for \$500,000 each by that gentleman. Since his appearance

before the Committee—at his own demand—hardly anything has been heard from General George Van Horn Moseley.

4. The Committee has shown the way in which the Communist Party, the Bund and similar groups have sought to use already existing organizations and institutions for their purposes—or failing that have set up "front" organizations to establish contact with larger groups of people than the parent organizations could reach. To my mind this must not be taken to mean that every organization which the Communist Party or the Nazis attempt to penetrate must be forthwith abandoned by earnest progressives or earnest conservatives. In the case of one or two organizations which are nothing more nor less than Communist catspaws, this is probably all there is left to do, but a glance at the list of organizations described by Earl Browder as "transmission belts for the Communist Party" will show how impossible any constructive activity would be if everyone else abandoned all organizations which the Communists have tried to penetrate. And it would perhaps be even more preposterous to suggest that sincere Christians should leave their churches because one or two people belonging to that church have strayed so far from an understanding of its true Gospel as to preach essentially Nazi or Fascist doctrine under the protection of that church. What this portion of the Committee's work does show, however, is the urgent necessity for earnest people in all organizations of every sort to free their organizations from any control exercised by any group committed to a foreign philosophy of dictatorship and mapping its course with a view to serving that dictatorship rather than the best interests of the American people. These are the main things the Committee has shown. Obviously they are important.

On the other side of the ledger, however, are some important and weighty items. First is the danger that people will get the idea that an investigation of this sort is the answer to un-American activities. I doubt that it is even a quarter of the answer. The real answer to un-American activities can only be found in a very much more earnest drive by all sincerely devoted people in this country toward solving unemployment, eliminating the slum and doing all things necessary to remove

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the causes which make men a prey to the doctrines of Communism, Naziism, Fascism, as an escape from the dilemma of their poverty and helplessness in the midst of possible plenty. Unless these things are done there will be little value in the work of this Committee. If the Committee is continued, and its members really want to strike an effective blow at un-American activities, they will have some hearings on the economic and social causes of un-American activities.

But the work of this committee or any other like it can be discredited and can yield very harmful results if its findings are not carefully made on the basis of real evidence, if innocent people's good names are injured, if a distinction is not made between mistakes on the one hand and consciously planned conspiracy on the other, and above all, if its work is used by unscrupulous poli-

ticians as an excuse for attacking indiscriminately progressive and labor organizations and for calling their political opponents by such names as "Communist," "Nazi," or "Fascist." The main reason I voted last January against continuing the committee was because it had allowed to go unchallenged irresponsible and untrue charges against such men as Culbert Olson, Sheridan Downey, and other sincere leaders in California and other states. And one of the serious mistakes made by the Committee since I have been a member of it has been the publication of the names of all the members of the American League for Peace and Democracy who are employed by the government. The committee itself stated at the time that it had no proof at all that any of these persons was a communist. Yet the list was published in paper after paper under the headline: "Dies Committee reveals list of Government Reds." Evidently injustice was done, therefore, to many of these people whether the committee intended this to be the result

or not. Another thing that can cause a great deal of misunderstanding and mischief is advance predictions by committee members about what the committee is going to do or what it is going to prove. This is not only prejudging a case; it is a foolish practice. If the Committee can prove a certain thing it ought to do it first and talk about it afterward.

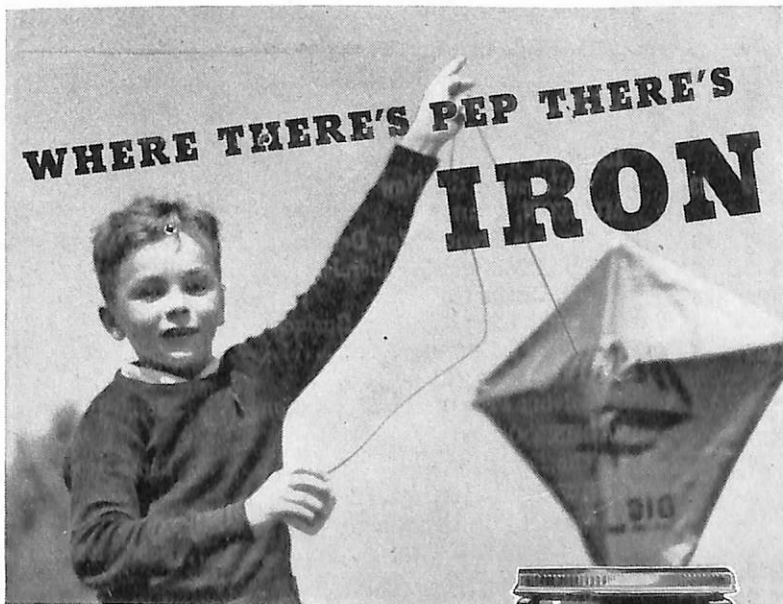
I have tried very hard to do what I could to keep the record straight and to have it present an accurate picture of the real situation in this country. For it is most important to remember the truly noble loyalty to the ideals of democracy and America that has been shown by at least 98 per cent. of our people during these trying years.

One of my greatest fears has been that the Committee would be made an excuse for an attack on labor and labor's rights. I have seen so much of attempts to dub as "Communists" some of the very men who are fighting the Communists in the front lines of the labor movement. I have seen so much of the business of glossing over frightful conditions of workers merely because some real or imagined Communists have had to do with a strike. It is basically our fault if Nazis or Communists gain influence—the fault of those of us who ought to be improving our people's conditions more rapidly than we are.

The Dies Committee would render a service to America by sticking to its job of revealing the true facts concerning the real un-American activities—that is those which are directed and controlled from abroad and which seek to take advantage of our American liberties in order to destroy them and set up a dictatorship of any sort in their place.

The Dies Committee can do great harm to America if it consciously or unconsciously gives encouragement to the forces of reaction by confusing with un-American activities the necessary patriotic and eminently American movements which seek to establish greater justice and better economic opportunity for all within the framework of the Constitution. For upon the success of such movements depends the real hope for the triumph of American principles of life and government and for the giving of a new gospel of hope to a needy and distressed world.

JERRY VOORHIS,
House of Representatives,
Washington, D. C.



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