

Probe Coughlin Paper As Seditious --- Biddle

(Daily Worker Washington Bureau)

WASHINGTON, D. C., April 17.—Attorney General Francis Biddle^{4/17/42} announced today that the Department of Justice will seek an indictment of the persons responsible for publishing Father Coughlin's Social Justice on charges of sedition.

Biddle told a press conference that he has instructed Federal Prosecutor William P. Maloney to put the facts about the defeatist, pro-Hitler propaganda in Social Justice before a Grand Jury which has been meeting here on activities of Axis agents.

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Describing Social Justice as "clearly seditious," Biddle said that Maloney will begin presenting his evidence next week, and that the Grand Jury would go thoroughly into all phases of the ownership, sponsorship and Nazi ties of the publication.

The Attorney General left little doubt that the investigation will reach Father Coughlin, who formerly disassociated himself from the management of the sheet in 1940, when he said the Grand Jury would delve into the question of "who is responsible for its policies."

Asked especially whether he would call Coughlin personally before the Grand Jury if he were in Prosecutor Maloney's place, Biddle said he "would be inclined" to do so.

Biddle said that the Coughlin case is "the first in a series" and made it plain that the Department of Justice is planning a general crackdown on publications both in English and in foreign languages which follow a "consistent pattern" of Axis propaganda.

"We will take vigorous action to prevent publication and distribution of any criminally seditious publication," Biddle declared.

Department of Justice action against Coughlin followed the Post Office Department order, which was issued at Biddle's request, barring Social Justice from the mails.

SEEK COMPLETE BAN

The Post Office order now obviously appeared to be only an initial step in putting Coughlin's outfit completely out of business.

Biddle said that the Department of Justice "has power" to prevent Social Justice from being distributed by railway express, which is one device that might be used to get around the order barring the paper from the mails.

Under the war powers of the government, Biddle said, the distribution of the paper could be stopped "at its source" and its printing could also be halted.

He told newspapermen that the Grand Jury would dig deeply into the whole set-up of Social Justice and it might take some time to complete the investigation.

Assisting Maloney in the investigation will be Lieut. Edward J. Hickey of the Navy Department. Formerly a Department of Justice investigator, Hickey is being loaned to Biddle for the Grand Jury proceedings.

Majority stock holders of Social Justice are Coughlin's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas J. Coughlin, listed as editor is Perron Schwartz.

Coughlin is still listed by the paper as "founder" and his views obviously continue to dominate the publication.

FACE JAIL TERMS

If indictments are returned against those responsible for the sheet they will be liable to prosecution under the espionage act of 1917 which imposes maximum penalties of 20 years in jail, a \$10,000 fine or both.

This act makes it a crime to "willfully make or convey false reports or false statements with intent to interfere with the operation or success of the military or naval forces of the United States or to promote the success of its enemies," and it is under this section of the law that the Department of Justice is expected to strike against Social Justice.

Biddle's recent letter to Attorney

General Frank Walker charged that there is "a striking similarity" between articles in Social Justice and the general line of Axis propaganda.

One of the most difficult problems facing the Justice Department in attacking defeatist publications, Biddle said, is drawing the line between "legitimate criticism" and actual sedition.

A determining factor, he explained, will be whether the publication has followed "systematically the line of the Axis." He said that another factor would be misstatement of facts with a view to further the Axis cause.

Biddle reiterated his belief in the right to criticize the government as distinguished from seditious attacks which aid the Axis.

He said that he did not believe there was a need to revise the espionage act, and that the law as it stands could be used effectively to deal with Axis agents.

While stating that most foreign language papers are "loyal" Biddle said that the Justice Department together with the War Department and the Post Office Department were studying certain language papers which are seditious.

Biddle called the anti-alien bill introduced by Senator Tom Steward of Tennessee "unwise."