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Post 9/30/19

New Evidence May Shed Light on How Dennett Got Franked Envelopes

By Dillard Stokes
Post Staff Writer

New evidence has opened a sensational line of inquiry on how it happened that bales of Congressmen's franked envelopes were at the command of Prescott Dennett, officer of organizations said by the Government to be financed in anti-interventionist activities by "known German agents."

A House truck hauled ten mail bags of material from the House Office Building to Dennett's headquarters in the last week of August. Investigators have talked to the men having knowledge of this transaction, and also to those familiar with the hauling of another bag in June.

Other large deliveries of franked material to other groups also are under scrutiny.

Evidence of a Tag

At the disposal of the grand jury will be the evidence of a tag, found on a mailbag sent away by Dennett the morning after the grand jurors sent for him. This tag is addressed "From" Representative Hamilton Fish "To" Prescott Dennett.

Mr. Fish told The Post last night that he has no idea how this could have come about. "We said that we had not sent him any speeches," he commented. "I said in my speech yesterday that my secretary did not remember sending him any. But I didn't say it was impossible."

Representative Fish said on the floor of the House yesterday that Dennett two weeks ago had 500 copies of a speech by Fish. The Representative said he had no idea how Dennett got them.

Representative Fish said also that The Post published "contemptible, dastardly and lying" articles about the part his office played in supplying a truck in which Dennett got rid of 20 mailbags full of material.

Here is the record on this affair of the mailbags:

The origin was a grand jury investigation of suspected Nazi agents, which was instituted on September 16 by Special Assistant Attorneys General William Power Maloney and Edward J. Hickey of the "propaganda squad" of the Department of Justice.

Major Interest of Investigators

How the grand jurors came to be concerned with Prescott Dennett is not known.

Perhaps they were led to him by some disclosure from Frank B. Burch, the Akron, Ohio, lawyer, whom they indicted on September 23 on a charge of failing to register himself as an agent of the German government.

Perhaps they picked up his trail in a report of the Federal agents who had been working on the case for months.

At any rate, the wide activities of this man Dennett became a major interest of the grand jurors and of the Department of Justice. He was secretary-treasurer of the Make Europe Pay Committee, later called the Islands for War Debts Committee. His known activities also included running the Columbia Press Service and the Columbia Photo Service. Maloney charged in open court that he got some of his money from "known German agents."

Affair of the Bags

The night of September 18 Dennett was served with a subpoena commanding his appearance before the District grand jury. The next morning there occurred the first of the significant developments of the strange affair of the mailbags.

1. About 9 a. m. on Friday, September 19, George Hill, one of Representative Fish's secretaries, went to Frank R. Monroe, foreman of

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mail platforms of the branch post-office in the New House Office Building. Hill wanted a truck sent immediately to Dennett's headquarters in a residence apartment house at 1430 Rhode Island Avenue Northwest, to pick up, he said, some things for Fish.

2. The truck was sent, driven by Assistant Foreman Charles Wilson, 25, 305 New Jersey Avenue Southeast. Dennett and Wilson loaded 20 mailbags, all bulging and apparently heavy. Nettled by a neighbor's criticism of the noise they were making, Wilson retorted that he was not supposed to be doing this kind of work. The mailbags were stuffed with unaddressed franked envelopes which contained isolationist speeches by members of the House and Senate.

How Did He Get Them?

(3) Ten such mailbags were hauled by a House truck from the House Office Building to Dennett's headquarters in the last week in August. One such bag was hauled by a House truck from the House Building to Dennett's place in June. These facts bear directly upon the question which has not yet been answered by any of the Congressmen or Senators whose franks were on the envelopes, that is: How did Dennett come to have such quantities of postage free material?

(4) The House truck drove off with the 20 mailbags and its first stop was the headquarters of the America First Committee, 126 C Street Northeast, where 12 of them were left. At least one of these bags had a tag on it, stating that it was "From" Representative Fish "To" Mr. Dennett.

(5) When the truck got back to the House Office Building, George Hill, Representative Fish's secretary, who had sent the truck out, ordered the remaining eight bags placed in storeroom 30, on the sixth floor of the new House Office Building, in which is a bin used by Representative Fish.

(6) There was a blunder, as a result of which this order was not carried out, but instead Michael O'Gorman, a clerk, pushed the eight bags into Representative Fish's office on a four-wheeled vehicle like a baggage truck. As O'Gorman started away, Hill repeated the order. The bags then were placed in storeroom 30, in front of Representative Fish's bin.

Drove Truck Bearing Mailbags



CHARLES WILSON, assistant foreman of mail platforms of the branch post-office in the New House Office Building, drove the truck that was sent to Prescott Dennett's headquarters in a residence apartment house, 1430 Rhode Island Avenue Northwest, to pick up—said one of the Congressman's secretaries—"some things for Mr. Fish." Wilson, who reported he wasn't supposed to be doing this kind of work, and Dennett put 20 mailbags, all loaded and apparently heavy, into the truck. Wilson is a Duke University graduate

Memory Grew Hazy

(7) With the bags off his mind, Dennett went before the grand jury, disclosed a hazy memory when asked who belonged to his committees and where he got his money and was excused with orders to be back on Tuesday, September 23, with his records. Although a subpoena later reiterated this order, Dennett did not comply and was haled into court for contempt proceedings, which were held up when he agreed to surrender "all" his records to the prosecutors. When he gave up what he had, he said nothing about the franked matter he had sent away in the 20 mailbags.

(8) Last Thursday the America First Committee turned over ten mailbags to United States deputy marshals who served a subpoena calling for "the 12 mail sacks containing printed and written matter, envelopes, or other material, delivered at the request of Hamilton Fish, member of Congress, . . . and identified as coming from the residence of Prescott Dennett." What happened to the other two mailbags has not yet been revealed.

(9) Last Thursday night Representative Fish told The Post: "I don't know anything about any mailbags being taken up to my office. I was there last Friday and Saturday, too, and I ought to have known about it."

Admits Sending Truck

(10) Last Friday Representative Fish admitted that his office sent the truck which hauled the bags for Dennett, but he told The Post this was done to pick 500 copies of one of his speeches that Dennett had not mailed. He said he didn't know how Dennett got the speeches. If there were mailbags at the Capitol, said the Representative, they were not his.

(11) Last Saturday, Walter L. Reynolds, another secretary to Representative Fish, announced that "about ten filled mailbags have been found just outside Mr. Fish's storage room." To The Post, Reynolds said: "They are not ours. We don't care what happens to them. Mr. Fish said yesterday that the Department of Justice can have them if it wants them. You can come and get them yourself, if you want to. I found them yesterday. I won't show you where they are, because I want nothing to do with them. But I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll have Wilson, who drove the truck, show you where they are. Come on out." But 15 minutes later, a Post reporter found Reynolds gone.

(12) Having investigated the case thoroughly before publishing the role of Representative Fish's office, The Post was able to accept Reynolds' invitation without the professed guide. The bags were in

storeroom 30, where they were placed eight days before, upon the orders of George Hill. On one of them was a tag with the address, "Cong. Fish, Attention Mr. Hill." The tag and samples of the franked envelopes in the bags were reproduced in The Post the next day.

Legislator Denies In House Any Link With Missing Propaganda Bags

By Robert De Vere

Post Staff Writer

In a speech lasting nearly an hour, Representative Hamilton Fish (Republican), of New York, yesterday denied on the House floor having any connection whatsoever with 20 mailbags of antiinterventionist documents removed last Friday from the Make Europe Pay and Island for War Debts Committees at 1430 Rhode Island Avenue Northwest.

Fish called the news reports printed in The Washington Post and the New York newspaper PM "contemptible, dastardly and lying."

The copyrighted articles in The Post had reported tracing eight mail bags, filled chiefly with isolationist speeches of members of the House and Senate, from headquarters of the committees to Fish's office, and from there to a storeroom in the House Office Building, outside a bin assigned to Fish.

Carried in Mail Truck

The news story printed in The Post stated that the bags were carried in a House of Representatives mail truck; that the truck was dispatched at the request of the office of Representative Fish, to the Rhode Island Avenue office of Prescott Dennett, secretary-treasurer of the committee. The night before the truck was dispatched, Dennett was summoned to appear before the grand jury investigating Nazi agents.

Twelve mail bags, The Post reported, were carried in the same truck to the office of the America First Committee, 126 C Street Northeast.

The mail bags, Fish told the House, were left outside his storage bin without his knowledge. He declared that he has yet to see the bags or to examine their contents. He declared The Post's stories implied that he was present at Dennett's office when the bags were removed. Fish emphatically declared he has not seen Dennett for more than a year.

Explains Truck's Mission

Fish declared that one of his secretaries sent the truck to Dennett's office to obtain 500 copies of one of the legislator's speeches, entitled "No Convoys, No War." Dennett, he said, called his secretary and inquired if he wanted the speeches returned. Fish said:

"So he (the secretary, George Hill) said he would send down a truck for those speeches, only 500, as I am told, and did so within a couple of days. There was no hurry. The next thing he knew about 20 bags or sacks of mail were delivered to my office and he refused to take any of them."

Fish accused The Post and PM of making "smear charges" against him and, through him, against every United States citizen who is opposed to this country going to war. It is his belief, he said, that the charges are being picked up by other newspapers. "The pro-war newspapers will smear anybody," he added.

About a half hour after the opening of the session, Fish took the floor on a "question of personal privilege." He sent to Speaker Sam Rayburn the first page of a recent copy of PM bearing the headline:

"Ham Fish Snatches Evidence

See FISH, Page 4, Column 1.

Wanted in U. S. Nazi Hunt."

Rayburn read the headline to the House and then held that a question of privilege had been stated, a ruling that automatically entitles a member to speak for an hour.

"I think it will not be necessary to take the whole hour to answer these contemptible, dastardly charges that have been made against me, not only by PM, a New York newspaper, but by the morning Post of Washington," Fish began. "These smear charges from beginning to end are based on a series of lies."

He continued:

"It is a disagreeable duty for me to take the floor before my fellow members of Congress, with some of whom I have served for at least 21 years, and have to defend myself from such contemptible and lying charges as that I was responsible for going to an office which I did not even know existed and for snatching papers that are needed by the Government and bringing them back to the House Office Building or somewhere else . . .

"There are no mail bags in my office. None has been delivered there as my secretary refused to accept any. If any were left at any place in the Capitol in my name, it is without my knowledge and the Government can have them for the asking."

Reporter Criticized

Frequently Fish was interrupted by questions from House members.

During one of these exchanges, Representative Coffee (Democrat), of Washington, questioned the action of Dillard Stokes, Washington Post reporter, in examining eight mail bags in the House Office Building Saturday.

Flourishing a clipping from The Sunday Post, Coffee declared:

"On page 12 of that issue appears a significant expression purporting to quote the gentleman to the effect that he had invited The Post reporter to go in and open the mail bags and take whatever he wanted and do whatever he pleased with them. Then the article said that when The Post accepted the invitation it was found that one of the bags had a tag with this address on it, 'Congressman Fish, attention of Mr. Hill.'"

"What I want to ask the gentleman is, what right has any newspaper reporter . . . to go into a storeroom owned by any member of this Congress, open a locked door, open a mail bag and take things out and photograph them, whether they came from Mr. Dennett's office or anywhere else?"

No Protection?

"My God, do we have no protection here from burglary? What is the matter with the captain of police? Here is a statement in The Washington Post admitting burglary on the part of one of their own men."

Fish responded: "That is absolutely right."

(The Post story stated that the invitation to examine the bags and their contents was issued, not by Representative Fish, but by a member of his office staff.)

Representative Patrick (Democrat), of Alabama, took the floor to point out that the bags were not under lock and key. He said he wanted to know "what is being assailed."

"If the gentleman from the press, whether you want to call him a gentleman or not, was invited there and was allowed to take this matter, where is the burglary?" Patrick asked.

Resents "Smearing"

Representative Fish said he wanted to "make clear at the outset" that he believes "the 15 or 20 per cent who want to go to war have an absolute right to express their views." The 85 per cent who oppose war have the same right, he added.

But the noninterventionists, he continued, "should not be smeared every day by those newspapers which want to take us into war."

Shortly after Fish began a chronology of the mail bags, Representative McCormack (Democrat), of Massachusetts, the majority leader, observed:

"The origin is that there was a grand jury investigation under way investigating persons who are alleged to be German propagandists in this country."

"That is correct," said Fish. "So the origin is the grand jury," McCormack resumed. "I do not want to inject myself except we do want to get the correct origin for the record, that this is a grand jury investigation and everything that emanated from it was from the grand jury and the courts."

"That is correct," said Fish.

to Dennett's office. He said The Post, in this manner, attempted to "make the public believe that I had some hookup with that organization."

"To make the point clear that there is no hookup," Fish stated, "I do not belong to the organization, I did not know where it was, had never been there, in spite of these definite charges."

Accepts Bouquet

House members roared when Fish then added:

"Because that is pretty definite when it describes me as a well-dressed member of Congress. I am sure every member of Congress will recognize that."

Shortly after Fish told the House that "all the smear combined . . . will not keep me from trying to keep America out of war," McCormack took the floor again and said:

"The word 'smear' has been used a lot in the discussion and the gentleman has gone pretty far afield and I want to clear up one thing. The gentleman is not including in the word 'smear' the grand jury?"

Fish—"Certainly not."

McCormack—"Nor the judge?"

Fish—"No. I want to read, though, what the judge said. He is just mistaken."

Later Fish paraphrased the language of the mail sack subpoena in which District Court Justice Jesse Adkins "commanded" the bags delivered "at the request" of Fish to the America First Committee, "by mail truck of the House of Representatives on Friday, September 19."

"Error" Laid to Judge

"That gives my name," said Fish. "In the first place, I was not in Washington on the nineteenth. In the second place, my secretary did not deliver it to the America First Committee. He would not accept any of these mailbags. They took them because some were evidently addressed there."

Fish said Justice Adkins made an "error," and added:

"That is the most kindly thing I can say about it. Being a judge, I will let it go at that."

No Right to Refrank

Dennett, continued Fish, offered to return his 500 speeches "himself." Fish said his secretary informed him that this could not be done legally, that "under the law he had no right to reframe speeches."

When the 20 mail bags arrived, Fish declared, his secretary told the truckman:

"All I want are the 500 speeches of Congressman Fish and I don't know what these (other) speeches are; they are not from this office. Just take them away."

Fish declared he had not the "faintest idea" why eight mailbags were left near his storage bin.

Representative O'Connor (Democrat), of Montana, asked how Dennett's office happened to have 500 of Fish's speeches. Fish replied:

"I asked my secretary, of course, when I got back, how they got those speeches, and they told me, both secretaries—because I interviewed them both in detail—that they were never sent there."

Anyone Can Do It

"The only way that they can imagine they got there was that either Mr. Dennett or some member of his staff came into my office, where I have certain speeches, and either took them or got them in the corridor, and anybody can come in and take 500 speeches of any member of Congress, Republican or Democratic."

"It makes a rather small bundle. That was probably the way they got there. They got them naturally from my office, I suppose, but they were not sent there and I am very glad that the gentleman raised that point."

When his secretaries tried to get the speeches back, Fish said, they did not know that Dennett had been subpoenaed. Fish laughed when he read from a Post clipping that "a tall, well-dressed, distinguished-looking man resembling Fish" came