

Washington Daily *Fr 10/7/41* Merry-Go-Round

(Trade Mark Registered)

By DREW PEARSON and ROBERT S. ALLEN

Last year U. S. taxpayers shelled out a total of \$1,217,346 of their hard-earned money to reimburse the post office for handling a total of 45,128,977 pieces of free mail sent by members of Congress.

But now it develops that part of this money was spent to mail literature for an organization which the Justice Department charges was financed by German agents. In other words, the unknowing and innocent taxpayer joined with Mr. Hitler's boys in helping certain isolationist Congressmen flood the country with propaganda.

This was why such a hot game of hide-and-go-seek was played in the America First Committee and in the basement of Congress in an effort to dispose of mail bags crammed with franked propaganda belonging to Representative Ham Fish. The bags had been whisked out of the Make Europe Pay War Debts Committee just before the Justice Department raided it.

Congressman Fish's franked envelopes escaped the FBI raiders, but the mailbags of several other Congressmen did not. Most of these Congressmen had voted for an act requiring everyone who distributed propaganda for a foreign country to register with the State Department. Yet, these Congressmen appeared to have violated the spirit of the act for which they voted by loaning their sacred, free-mailing privilege to an organization deliberately in the business of foreign propaganda.

Furthermore, they appeared to have violated another law passed by their own distinguished body in 1906—namely, title 39, section 335—which provides:

"It shall be unlawful to lend said frank or permit its use by any committee, organization, or association, or permit its use by any person for the benefit or use of any committee, organization, or association."

And, yet, whole truckloads of mail bearing the frank of Senators Nye, Wheeler, Worth Clark of Idaho, Reynolds of North Carolina; the late Senator Lundeen of Minnesota, and various Congressmen have been turned over to the America First Committee, the Make Europe Pay War Debts Committee, the Steuben Society, and other isolationist or pro-German organizations.

Early History of Franking

Next time you get a letter from your Congressman or any branch of the Government, it might be well to know that this right of free mail goes back to 1775 when the Continental Congress resolved "That all letters to and from the delegates of the United Colonies, during the sessions of Congress, pass and be carried free of postage, the members being engaged upon their honor not to frank or enclose any letters but their own."

This privilege was extended to some other branches of the early American government in 1782, namely the Commander in Chief of the Armies, the heads of the Departments of Finance, of War, and of Foreign Affairs, and members of Congress "while actually attending Congress."

The franking privilege today has been stretched a long way since then. In fact, Post Office authorities compare today's indiscriminate farming out of Congressional franks to a similar situation in 1867 when Postmaster General Randall demanded that the franking privilege be withdrawn from Congress. Re-

porting to President Andrew Johnson, he said:

"I am compelled again to call attention to the gross frauds perpetrated upon the department by the violation of the franking privilege in almost all parts of the country. The facsimile franks of different members of Congress are freely used to circulate obscene books and papers, lottery circulars, business cards and to cover all kinds of business and domestic correspondence of persons not authorized by law to frank mailable matter."

As a result the franking privilege for Congressmen was re-abolished in 1873, then reinstated in 1875, and broadened again in 1906—though at all times it has provided that a Congressman can circulate from the Congressional Record that portion of it written by himself.

Wise Men of Zion

Despite the very clean wording of the law, the franked envelopes of Congressman Ham Fish have turned up containing an advertisement of the Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion, and damning the Jews. Unquestionably Ham Fish did not write this anti-Semitic literature or even mail it. But his franked envelopes were farmed out somehow or other for this purpose.

Again, Senator Nye's frank has been used to circulate a speech by Theo H. Hoffman, national chairman of the Steuben Society of America. Nye got around the provision that the speech must be written by himself by inserting Hoffman's speech in the Congressional Record.

Again, when Senator Wheeler sent out his much publicized postcard regarding war, which found its way into the Army camps, he simply turned his frank over to the America First Committee. They mailed a million copies, saving \$10,000 worth of postage. Yet the law of 1906 is clear that it is "unlawful to lend said frank or permit its use by any committee, organization or association."

Again, at a meeting addressed by Donald Shea of the National Gentile League, envelopes bearing the frank of Senator Wheeler were distributed in the audience and listeners were urged to address and mail them—postage free.

And in Los Angeles last summer a meeting was held in Dr. Richter's Health Cafeteria to organize pickets against Wendell Willkie when he came to speak at the Hollywood Bowl. Those who attended the Richter meeting were given the franked envelopes of Congressman Day of Illinois containing his speech of June 15 critical of the British. All the audience had to do was address the envelope and send it—postage free—to anyone.

Prize violator of the franking privilege, however, was the late Senator Lundeen, whose speeches were written by George Sylvester Viereck, a paid agent of Germany, and who then turned over his congressional frank to have the speeches mailed all over the country—postage free.

No wonder even placid Postmaster General Frank Walker is getting stirred up as to whether he should do something about the franking privilege. For he has the power—and no one can question it—to refuse mail from any Congressman suspected of violating the law.

So far the worried Mr. Walker has not used it.

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