

\$7000 a Year From Office Workers:

# Late Sen. Lundeen Made His Staff Kick-Back Pay

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By IZETTA WINTER ROBB



Sen. Lundeen

In the three months preceding the death of the late Sen. Ernest Lundeen (F.-L., Minn.), I worked in his office as a writer. I was not told when I was hired that one-third of the salary I received from the Senate disbursing office must be returned to what was delicately characterized "the Office Reserve Fund." Out of \$150, I gave \$50 to the Senator. This money went to the Senator's personal account in the Riggs National Bank.

Nor was I the only one to participate in this system. Every person in the office "kicked back" large amounts that proved in one instance to be approximately two-thirds of the month's salary. Nor, apparent-

ly, is Sen. Lundeen the only legislator on the Hill who augments his salary by such a racket. I was told the kick-back was quite prevalent in some other offices.

## SWORE TO CHARGES

One day in June, 1940, four of us signed under oath a written statement as to the character and the amount of the transactions by which Lundeen personally benefited in the amount of several thousand dollars per year. We poor he had always with him, because he kept us so.

The Senate salaries were paid in cash for which we had duly given receipt to the disbursing office, so we realized that it would be hard to prove as a matter of record our true income for tax purposes. We wanted the record straight. One day our chance came. A telegram was received from the Senator, who was on a short visit to Minnesota, stating the amounts we were to receive for the month of June.

We had that telegram photostated.

## TRACED KICK-BACK

When I received my salary I gave \$50 to Harriet Johnson, the Senator's secretary who made out to me a receipt on behalf of the Senator. I then followed the money to its destination, the Senator's personal bank account. In making the deposit, we put in a duplicate deposit slip, which we kept as evidence.

A week later the Senator returned. The day after his return he strode into Room 110, his extra office, a kind of chamber of horrors in which resided piles and piles of newspapers and clippings, the accumulation of some 25 years of collecting, and blithely inquired, "How's everything?"

## ACCUSES SENATOR

"Perfectly rotten," I answered, and proceeded to tell him how I felt about a Farmer-Labor senator taking money from his staff with apparently no twinge of conscience.

I said I realized that he was not the only congressman to insist on "kick back" from members of his staff in order to supply himself with cash. But the Farmer-Labor Party as well as the State of Minnesota had been betrayed by him.

I pointed out that I was not saying these things in order to regain my \$50. (Incidentally, I never did see it again.) I told him I was primarily concerned with the survival of democracy. I told him I thought it was threatened when democratically elected representatives prove themselves neither gentlemen nor statesmen, but reach into the pockets of working women to augment their already sizable incomes. In a Farmer-Laborite, it was an interesting form of liberalism, to say the least.

## ASKED FOR 'BILL'

It wasn't easy for a newcomer to make such a speech to a U. S. Senator, but on that afternoon he simply muttered, "Put in your bill, and that ends it."

"But it doesn't end it," I said. "Don't try to intimidate me," he yelled.

"I'm not trying to. I'm only stating a natural law. Actions are not ended with declarations of finality."

## NO JOB—FOR TWO HOURS

Well, there I was, out of a job and \$50 short on my salary. That was about 2 p. m. Saturday early in July. Two hours later one of the Senator's secretaries called, and I went back to work in the office the following Monday, paid on the hourly basis the Senator had instituted after he had

had my name taken off the Senate rolls.

Curiosity sent me back, for his office held some of the atmospheric elements of a movie thriller: very interesting visitors, a secretary who believed in the Nazi philosophy, and other secretaries who were gathering bit by bit the dark story now being revealed in part at the trial of Hamilton Fish's secretary, George Hill.

## HE NEEDED MONEY

And the Senator needed money. Those of us who "contributed" to his income were certain of that. It could be said that in addition to being chairman of the Make Europe Pay-Islands-for-Debts Committee, the Senator headed still another group, "Let the Secretaries Give—Dollars-for-Jobs Committee."

Naturally it occurred to us that a man who could take \$210 a month from a girl listed on the Senate rolls at \$325 a month might be open to dishonorable acts in other directions.

Ernest Lundeen was proud of being a senator, but he was apparently unconcerned by the shame that would be his lot were his system of reducing wage levels in his office generally known.

On the basis of three months' "kick-back" in his office, we estimated that his personal gain from this source would amount to approximately \$7000 per year.

That last day of August, 1940, ended forever his chance to make restitution. The plane he took crashed in a field near Leesburg, Va.

Mercilessly the evil he did lived after him. Over one of the great radio networks last spring his widow blazed at those who attacked the Senator's record. But words could not stop public knowledge of his actions, nor death erase the record.

Born of good and honest parents in South Dakota, Ernest Lundeen rose step by step to a position of power and honor in Minnesota and the nation.

Thereafter followed the tragedy of his committing acts which his sudden death could not hide.

Several months later I joined the staff of The Washington Daily News. I refrained from writing this story for some time, because the man had died tragically, and there seemed little hope that telling it would do any good. However, if there are others on the Hill who are tired of kicking back to some other legislator, perhaps they can use some such system as we used to get proof of our victimization.

## Jury Begins Deliberation of Hill Case

George Hill, whose "scores of witnesses" failed to materialize to bolster his perjury trial defense, today awaits the decision of the jury which received the case after Justice F. Dickinson Letts' charge this morning. Mr. Hill's lawyers had rested yesterday when the last of the Government's evidence had been offered.

Special Prosecutor William Power Maloney brought the dread Gestapo into the court room during the final stage of the trial of the 45-year-old secretary of Rep. Hamilton Fish, when he said the Nazi propaganda machine had put into Mr. Hill's mouth the lies of which he stands accused.

The jury must decide whether Mr. Hill swore falsely to a special grand jury investigating subversive activities. Did he lie when he said he did not order eight mail bags removed from their regular place and stored in a room used by Rep. Fish? Did he lie when he told the grand jury he did not know George Sylvester Viereck, German propagandist?

If the jury finds Mr. Hill guilty, he can be sentenced to 2 to 10 years on each of the charges.