

Strip based Fake Le Plot to Discredit Dies Probers

This is the fifth of a series of articles by Robert E. Stripling on the Communist conspiracy in the United States. Stripling was chief investigator for the House un-American activities committee from 1938 to 1948. The articles were edited by Bob Considine, Times-Herald and International News Service columnist.

By ROBERT E. STRIPLING

REP. FRANK E. HOOK (D) of Michigan rose one day in Congress, early in January 1940, and brandished several photostat letters bearing the letterhead of the Silver Shirt Legion of America and the signature of William Dudley Pelley.

The letters were addressed to Chairman Martin Dies of the House un-American activities committee. One read in part, "... as you told me in your office, my organization has nothing to worry about, as we are close friends."

I had been tipped off late in 1939 that an involved plot to destroy Dies and the committee was being hatched by powerful influences in Washington.

The question of whether or not the committee had justified its existence was about to be brought before the House of Representatives. The letters, of course, raised a tremendous furor. Dies' protests (from Texas) that he did not know Pelley and had never corresponded with the American Fascist were submerged in widespread demands that the committee be dissolved.

Hook read the text of the letters into the Congressional Record but, curiously, refused to let any member of the committee, or me, examine them. Instead, he placed them, he said, in his safe deposit box at the Riggs National bank.

In the middle of the demands for Dies' head, and a rules committee fight over whether Hook's remarks should be expunged from the record, I kept thinking of an inveterate Washington "fixer" named David Dubois Mayne, who was a Pelley lieutenant.

I set out in search of him and the search finally led to Springfield, Va. His small home was locked, but I found the local postmistress and asked her to have Mayne call me if, by chance, she saw him.

That was on a Saturday. Monday morning he appeared at my office in the old House Office building.

I took a long chance and, pointing at him severely, shouted, "Mayne, you wrote those letters, didn't you?"

"Yes," he said, mildly. "Sit down," I invited. Then I called in the members of the committee, put Mayne under oath and he told his story, portions of which were subsequently denied by the persons he mentioned.

He told us that Gardner Jack-

son, formerly (and subsequently) a \$5,600-a-year, Amherst-graduated government economist, who was among the more articulate New Deal critics of the committee, had purchased the letters from him. The price was \$105 and the promise of a job through Jerome Frank, then chairman of the securities and exchange commission.

Mayne testified that Jackson's agent, one Harold Weisberg, at their first meeting, had asked him if he knew of any connection between Dies and Pelley. When Mayne answered that he knew of none, Weisberg said, "Well, keep looking. I'm sure you'll find something."

Mayne confessed that subsequently he wrote the letters on plain paper, forged Pelley's signature, and attached a Silver Shirt Legion letterhead by means of Scotch tape. He then had the material photostated and turned it over to Jackson, who apparently accepted it as authentic.

Once in possession of the material, Jackson gave a dinner at his Chevy Chase home for 10 members of Congress, including two members of the committee, and informed them of his find. Only Hook would agree to introduce the matter on the floor of the House.

Though he was under oath, I knew it was hopeless to rest my case on Mayne's testimony. I needed Pelley, who had dropped out of sight after violating parole on a "Blue Sky" conviction in North Carolina.

I asked Mayne where Pelley could be found, but that only frightened him. So I mused aloud:

"Well, I'm glad he hasn't shown himself. If he did, I'd have to serve him with a subpoena, and if I did that it would mean that North Carolina couldn't serve the warrant it has out for him."

Mayne began to show some interest.

"Yes," I went on, with an elaborate sign, "I'd hate to do that fellow a favor, and make it possible for him to get all that publicity."

Pelley walked into my office the next morning. He had shaved off his gray goatee and was affecting a cap.

I called the committee to the office and let them hear his

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denial of ever having met or written to Dies. We took him to a meeting of the rules committee to repeat his story, and when we produced the typewriter on which Mayne had written the letters, the case against Dies and the committee was dead.

Hook insisted that he had been framed. Mayne was convicted of forgery, probably the lowest case of forgery in the Justice department's annals. And Congress gave the committee another lease on life.

(Tomorrow: Mr. Stripling begins the saga of Joe Lash and the effect the Hitler-Stalin pact had on U. S. Communists.)

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