

5/5/40

Dear Cameron,

The biggest and strangest thing here this past week was the debate in the House of Representatives on the various Wage-Hour amendments. The real story has not appeared in any of the papers I saw. I think it is a good story. However, if you should want to use it let me check some of my sources, which were confidential, first.

No real effort was made to counteract the employer attack on the amendments until the CIO called its boys in several weeks ago. Methodically they visited their Representatives and told them that a vote for the amendments would cost them labor support and get them labor opposition. All members stand for reelection this year. Undoubtedly, this had a considerable effect on the vote on the Barden amendments. A real push in the stretch defeated the Barden amendments. There remained the more dangerous Norton bill, which had the support of the administration. During the windup of the debate and immediately after the vote on the Barden bill Viot Marcantonio moved the recommit the Norton bill. Had Mary Norton supported his motion the bill would have been sent back to the committee and would have stayed there until after the end of the session. That is what should have happened. However, Norton opposed the motion. She carried with her about 40 votes. The margin by which the motion was defeated was of 30 votes. When that happened Marcantonio got together with the rest of the New York delegation and other liberal members and decided that when the crippling amendments, which were sure to be offered, as they were, were proposed, their group would leave the floor, voting neither

for nor against. The voting and debate were in "committee of the whole", the entire House sitting as a committee. There were no record votes on amendments to the bill. Soon the most monstrous amendments were offered to the bill reported by the House Labor Committee (Mary Norton, chairman. The bill bore here name thus). The absence of a large number of liberals gave the reactionaries a large enough margin to carry them. Soon Norton became worried and approached Marcantonio and another member and asked them to drop their palm. They asked her to kill the bill and she refused. She criticized them and was a bit undignified (none of this was formal and none is in the record.) When they told her they were going to defeat her bill their way she left. Marcantonio told her that within a half hour she would abandon her bill. The other member told her that the only reason she was anxious to pas the bill was because it was an important piece of legislation which bore her name. He was more interested in the conditions of the owrking people than her publicity, he said. While this group was in the cloakroom shortly thereafter Pat Boland (Pa.), majority whip, asked them to change their position and defeat the vicious amendments. He was told that the Southern bloc, which had supported the Barden bill, was looking for any kind of amendments to the Wages and Hours law, and as a consequence would pass any bill they thought they could. Boland investigated and found out that this was true. Barden had previously so informed one of the abstainers. About a half-hour later Norton was so disconcerted and angry theat she did a very undignified and foolish thing-she moved that the remaining amendments to her bill (numbering at that time 17) be adopted without debate or even consideration. She lost. Then she adandoned her bill. Meanwhile the rest of the amendments were run through and, of course, adopted, amost without exception. During this insane procedure the most unexpected man attended

forth to proclaim their love for labor, and in the name of this great love proposed amendments which would have exempted millions of workers from the protection of the act, or would have allowed other millions to work countless hours of overtime without compensation. Clare Hoffman, of Michigan, made one such proposition. He was so anxious to help labor, he said, that he had the legislative counsel of the House draft his bill, providing for all sorts of free overtime. Hoffman was one of the supporters of the company union in the Remington Rand strike, had his stuff published by the so-called "Constitutional Educational League", of New Haven and Birmingham, an anti-labor outfit. He also has connections ~~with~~ with Gerald L. K. Smith. In his own right Hoffman bows to none in his animosity toward organized labor.

By the time the bill was up for vote it was the most awful legislative monstrosity I have ever heard of. Obviously, if it passed the House the Senate would have to completely overhaul it, which would have sent it back to the House for approval of the Senate changes and would have taken time. If, by some strange accident, the reactionaries in the Senate could have passed the bill as it was, which was unlikely, the President would have been forced to veto it.

Meanwhile, Frank Hook, of Michigan, got in touch with a friend of his, Alfred Stedman, of the St. Paul Pioneer-Dispatch and told him that if the Wage-Hour amendments passed the labor and city Congressmen would join in opposition to the farm parity payments. Once this story got back to Washington there was another furore.

By way of background: Last year, during the effort to defeat the hamstringing of WPA, Marcantonio organized a caucus of 17 Congressmen who pledged themselves to vote against the farm parity payments if the farm bloc voted against WPA. When the farm group did so vote the retaliation was swift and cut, as I remember it--and this is just my memory--about \$200,000,000 from the parity bill. Of course, this just raised hell. So this year, with the memory of last years trouble recalled, some of the farm representatives stopped and thought it over. I dont doubt for a minute tat if the wages and hours legislation had passed congressmen from the cities would have retaliated.

The situation on Friday, right before the vote was this: if the bill passed the administration would be on the spot, having on its hands its own legislation ammended out of recognition, a bill that would have demanded a veto by the president if it passed the Senate. Thus the President would have been forced to take a definite position against the ammendments, He had not, having written only a short letter of a mild nature. On reaching the Senate the bill would have again caused trouble, this being an election year, particularly, and would have consumed much time. The administration wants Congress to adjourn as soon as possible, and they will probably be on their way home in a month. Meanwhile, all the anti-labot eggs were in two baskets--Barden's and Norton's. It is just about impossible to get anything through the necessary committees and out on the floor this session.

The papers are calling this an administration victory, as, in a small way it is. However, it is more a liberal and CIO victory, in

the course of which the administration got a slap in the face. Norton's bill was the administration's bill. She is the administration's (and Hague's) chairman of the Labor Committee, one of the most important posts in the House. Her prestige must suffer considerably not only because of her defeat but because she did a bad job. She fumbled and lost herself. That's a pretty tough thing to get away with in the brutal place. Those boys play rough, and for keeps.

I believe that this is the first time the administration's Munichois efforts have been stepped from the left. One thing I believe can definitely be taken from this incident: with good and intelligent liberal leadership there is a chance to preserve most of what is left of the New Deal. I doubt if the administration will try.

In my opinion Marcantonio should be given most of the credit. He really did a job.

Even in the end, however, they took the credit away. He was first on his feet with the motion to recommit, which was carried. Mrs. Norton and Representative Wadsworth (Rep., N.Y.) also arose. The chair recognized Wadsworth, and in the Record it was his motion that was made and carried. The vote on the amended ~~the~~ bill was 171 for and 211 against. The vote on the motion to recommit was 205 to 175. More of a touchstone to the sentiments of the Congressmen and the one by which labor will go is the first. the vote on the amended bill. It (so did the other) cut across party and sectional lines. Several Republicans and many from rural areas supported ~~in~~ the liberals.

Dies, of course, voted against both--rather, for the bill and against recommitment. Incidentally, a little over a year ago during

the first debate on the extension of the Dies committee, "Old Joe" Shannon, a Democratic party-liner assailed Dies as a "corridor slacker" because, when the liberals were attempting to push the original wage-hour bill through Dies Dies exactly what Marcantonio did this time-he kept his crowd off the floor.

The first part of the enclosed editorial from today's Star voices the typical conservative opinion and is a testimonial to the foresightedness of the liberals in the fight.

During this whole fight there were no signs of AFL action against amendments. However, on the days of the vote one of Bill Green's lobbyists, his chief, named, appropriately, Hushings, was in the gallery.

There are a few interesting sidelights to the whole fight. The House was ~~an~~ a madhouse. Often many of the members didn't know what was ~~st~~ happening. As late as the first of the two final votes it was necessary to explain to the members what they were voting on. For the first time there was a real split in the solid Southern front. This came during the middle of the week when Barden abandoned his bill. Eugene Cox, Dem., Ga., who was elected by a total vote of approximately 5,000, said that Barden was "laying down". Barden said he had as much fighting blood as Cox. The Record does not reveal exactly what happened. They were sore. Cox is a bully; he has been known to threaten to kick members. He is ranking majority member of the important House Rules committee, and dominates it. He is the most impolite member on the floor on the floor. His ungentlemanly attack on Barden, who did fight hard for his bill, will ~~l~~ alienate from him some of Cox's cohorts in the House.

Very quietly last week the Wages and Hours Administration eased out one of Barden's boys who was on the inside. I don't recall his name, but he was head of the "Cooperation and inspection" division. He was in charge of investigators and investigations. On one occasion, I have been informed, he raised hell because a Negro applicant for a job got as far as him. The division, a carry over from the original plan of cooperating with industry and explaining to them the wages and hours theory, thus achieving enforcement (!), was abolished, and the fellow was sent down to North Carolina to become regional director.

A husky, pleasant and quite personable fellow named Abernathy is opposing Barden in the primaries with some financial support from Sidney Hillman. Abernathy has a couple of jalopies, a pappy and two sons who fiddle and sing hill-billie songs, and a raffle wheel as his chief political tools. He sends the pappy and sons ahead of him by an hour or two. They go to the village stores and entertain the folks. Then Abernathy comes up (the trio then leaves), puts up his wheel and passes out tickets free. To the winners he gives away 10-pound bags of flour. There are about five winners, announced after he finished his speech. He begins by saying, "Barden is taking the bread out of your mouths. I am feeding you. Vote for me." Clever fellow, what? He is credited with a chance.

Speaking of Hillman, the old rumors of his secession are cropping out again. I understand that John Lewis spoke of this in an off-the-record talk to Time staffers. I have heard that Hillman will plead that not being in the CIO he will be in a better position to bring about labor unity.

The Southern reactionaries-particularly the Texas crowd- also took another lacing during the past ten days. The Texas gang is one of the most influential in the Congress, by the way. Garner runs the Senate, Rayburn runs the House, and many others have influential committee positions. And don't forget Dies. Well, the deal that the Garner gang had to accept is a distinct face-saving business. Not that they are well-known for keeping their promises, but this was a bad one for them. The Texas delegation will be half and half, and only on the first ballot will it vote for Garner. After that it is supposed to be Roosevelt's. The leader of the "liberal" faction of the Texas delegation is Lyndon Johnson, former congressional secretary who got to be boss without marrying his boss's daughter. Johnson is an able and young fellow. He used to run the "little Congress", a formally organized organization where lots of the boys and girls get real political experience. Its membership is limited to Congressional employees. They don't do anything that amounts to anything, though. Knute Hill, also a liberal, from Washington, used to be his predecessor's secretary.

Now that wages and hours is passed the next important items are WPA and the NLRB. WPA is up soon. I take it that the pro-amendment crowd are a bit concerned over their prospects of getting the board, for they have reopened their public smearings. Even Dies shut down for them and thus did not take up any of their space in the papers. The last formal action was a "report" by Toland full of the same old half-truths and exaggerations about the board and its personnel. By the way, you might take a look at that memo I gave you some time ago on the Smith committee. If you want to use a story on the Smith committee, you

have a lot of unused material there. Let me know if you plan such a story and I'll let you know when the fight will be really hot. You missed it by a week on the W-H story. Had it been a week earlier it might have been used on the floor during the fight. So might an NLRB story, if you have one.

I will try and get the full text of Jackson's report to Norris tomorrow, and if I do I'll mail it to you. The Times gave it and a small play, ~~although~~ they papers down here likewise buried it. I believe Norris will have something to say on this very soon. Sure is a swell whitewash.

When I was last in New York I told you about the possibility of a different FBI story, showing how much of their propoganda is false-no spies-no saboteurs, etc. I believe this is a good story. Let me know if you want it. It has never been used.

The grand jury this week was a ^{rough} ~~rough~~ and tumble. I expect, without reason, that we'll know on Tuesday. They were undoubtedly still trying to do a job on me and Pat-they had me in there much longer than anyone lese. I still don't see how they can help indicting Mayne on at least two counts. I have a feeling that either way there will be indictments. This jury, by the way, is the one that last week indicted the CP Dies witnesses. If they do indict, again either way, I'm going to have even less spare time. I'd like to come up toward the middle or the end of the week and have a long talk with you if you are not coming down here. There are lots of stories that I can get that I'd like to take up. Also, I'd like to tell you the Bat's story. I'm convinced that it is a big story, and I'm sure that some magazine is going to grab it if you don't.

Thanks for your letter. I have a record, except for this last check, of only two checks from you since I was in NY. That is, except for the check enclosed with your letter I have had only two checks from you since the big check. In addition to what you mentioned in your letter you owe me for a day that I spent, following receipt of Boyer's wife, looking for the mine story that didn't exist. Also the W-H stuff.

My observation down here is that you are making a bit of a reputation. However, I get continual complaints from my friends that they can't get the magazine. During the past week I looked at newsstands as I passed them and I don't recall once seeing the magazine displayed. On the several occasions on which I have enquired when I didn't see it I was told that it hadn't been sent out by the distributor. I'm just wondering what kind of cooperation they are giving you.

I am glad to hear that you have decided to go to the coast. I hope it works out well. It must have been pretty tough catching up so fast. I'm sorry if I caused you any trouble, but I was also disturbed. Please let me know if you agree to my coming up for a session with you. There's a lot I'd like to discuss. Or, if you are coming here on a day you know now, please let me know also.

Best regards (also to Dick)

Harold

P.S. The Thill speech is enclosed. I don't believe I sent you a copy of the enclosed Hoover speech, but if I did please return one. Also the Neutrality Section release. Note that last week Hoover said in NY that his critics are reds.