

Briggs Declares He Is Victim of Power Politics

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Suspended Ickes Aide
Testifies Half Hour
Before Grand Jury

George N. Briggs, suspended assistant to Secretary of the Interior Ickes, today went before the District grand jury investigating the mysterious "Hopkins letter," which Mr. Briggs allegedly supplied to the man who published it—C. Nelson Sparks, former Mayor of Akron, Ohio, author of the book, "One Man—Wendell Willkie."

He talked freely with reporters when he arrived at the Municipal Court Building, but when he emerged after appearing before the grand jury for a half hour he said he had nothing more to say.

Before he went into the grand jury room he said he was being made the victim of power politics and added:

"I'm not a mystery man. Bill Langer is throwing me to the wolves."

Senator Langer, Republican, of North Dakota last week read into the Congressional Record eight letters attributed to Mr. Briggs which reported to Mr. Sparks that Mr. Ickes told Mr. Briggs of the existence of the "Hopkins letter."

Refuses to Be Goat.

"Bill Langer is throwing me to the wolves," Mr. Briggs said, "in order to help himself, but I shan't be thrown to the wolves."

"Langer doesn't like Willkie, just like a lot of other Republicans. Langer doesn't like Hopkins. He doesn't like Ickes because Ickes as public works administrator had Langer impeached when Langer was Governor of North Dakota."

"This is my first taste of power politics. I'll have to acquire a taste for it, like olives. A lot of men in power politics seem to like it. I don't."

Asked if he knew Dr. Umphrey Lee, president of Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Tex., to whom the "Hopkins letter" was addressed, Mr. Briggs replied:

"I won't answer that."

Justice Department officials indicated earlier that Mr. Briggs was

to be the last witness before the grand jury. The jury inquiry was requested by Harry Hopkins, adviser to President Roosevelt. Mr. Hopkins said the letter, which forecast the Republican nomination of Mr. Willkie in 1944, was a forgery, and Assistant Attorney General Schweinhaut, handling the case, has corroborated him.

Watched by FBI Agents.

Mr. Briggs said he has been watched constantly by Federal Bureau of Investigation agents. He denied he has been "missing."

Mr. Briggs reported that his lawyer, James Murray, telephoned Senator Langer and "jumped all over him for exposing those letters."

"Mr. Murray told Langer I was the only man that could be hurt," Mr. Briggs said.

He added he had heard from his lawyer that Senator Langer indicated he considered the publication of the alleged Briggs correspondence—which was addressed to Mr. Sparks—offered the Senator a chance to give unfavorable publicity to Mr. Ickes, Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Willkie.

Tells of Meeting Ickes.

Mr. Briggs said his own distaste for Mr. Willkie led in a round-about way to his meeting Secretary of the Interior Ickes, for whom he went to work in 1941 as "assistant"

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Letter

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at a salary of \$5,600 a year. "Assistant" meant supervision of high Interior Department correspondence for English style.

Mr. Briggs recalled that he was Frank Gannett's "contact man" at the Republican Convention in Philadelphia in 1940, when Mr. Gannett hoped to get the nomination that went to Mr. Willkie. He added:

"I was so incensed over the manner in which Willkie grabbed the nomination that I went back home (to Chicago) and started to yell. I ran across Mayor Kelly and Kelly said Ickes was coming to Chicago to make a speech before some labor group. Kelly said, 'You ought to tell this to Ickes.'"

Thereupon, Mr. Briggs said, Mayor Kelly introduced him to the Secretary of the Interior.

Wrote Speech for Secretary.

"I wrote a speech for Ickes on this same matter in the fall of 1940 and he delivered it in Chicago."

The connection thus established led to Mr. Briggs' going to work at the Interior Department.

Mr. Briggs had a calm demeanor



GEORGE M. BRIGGS AT MUNICIPAL COURT—Mr. Briggs, key witness in the "Hopkins letter" case, photographed before his appearance at the grand jury today. —Star Staff Photo.

when, alone, he arrived at the Municipal Court Building at 9:50 a.m. He had wired Mr. Schweinhaut from New York Friday that he would appear at Mr. Schweinhaut's office at 10 a.m. today, but the meeting place later was changed to the courthouse.

Subpoena Put Under Door.

He told newspapermen that he left his house in Fairlington, Va., before the subpoena calling for his grand jury appearance at 1:30 p.m. last Wednesday was put there. The subpoena was put under his door Tuesday evening, Mr. Schweinhaut said. Mr. Briggs said he and his wife departed in order to escape the ringing telephone and went to stay with Mrs. Clare Briggs, widow of his brother, the noted cartoonist.

Mrs. Briggs, he said, found the subpoena when she went to the house Wednesday afternoon to bring in the milk. She at once called Mr. Schweinhaut, he said, and explained.

Mr. Briggs said he went to New York Thursday to obtain a lawyer and talked the whole case over with Mr. Murray, whom he retained. He said he had not spoken to Mr. Ickes since the Secretary suspended him from the Interior Department payroll last Tuesday.

Poses for Photographs.

Mr. Briggs was wearing a brown overcoat, a plaid suit and brown felt hat. He talked to newspapermen in the courthouse hallway and posed for photographers. He entered the grand juryroom at 10:35 with Mr. Schweinhaut and stayed there until 11:05.

Mr. Briggs said he talked to Mr. Schweinhaut on the telephone twice Saturday and once yesterday. He returned to his house in Fairlington yesterday.

"The FBI was trailing me day and night," he said. "I decided to call them off"—apparently by telegraphing to Mr. Schweinhaut.

Mr. Schweinhaut had no comment when he left the grand jury room, about 45 minutes after Mr. Briggs departed. Mr. Briggs said he was going home to Fairlington.

Mr. Briggs said he entered newspaper work with the old New York Mail in 1903 and had spent about 20 years off and on in newspaper work on the Chicago Examiner, Chicago American, Chicago Tribune, New York Press, Minneapolis Journal, St. Paul Pioneer Press, and had also worked in Scranton, Pa., and other places.

Judgment Revealed.

It was learned today that judgment against Mr. Briggs for \$7,285.56 was awarded in District Court in October to Edwin S. Bingham, jr., Los Angeles County, Calif. Henry J. Fox, Mr. Bingham's lawyer, said none of the money had been paid. He added that when Mr. Bingham sought a garnishment, there was a report of "no funds."

The suit represented an effort to collect money claimed due on a promissory note signed by Mr. Briggs in 1939 and borrowed from Edwin S. Binswanger, St. Paul, known also as Edwin S. Bingham. Mr. Bingham, jr., indorsed the note. The loan was for \$6,315, according to the suit, but Mr. Briggs paid \$1,000 of it. The sum awarded in the judgment included the principal, interest and lawyer's fees.