

Ickes Calls Sparks Leader of 'Agents' Of Isolationists

Talk With President About Briggs' Background Revealed by Secretary

Secretary of Interior Ickes today described the "Hopkins letter thriller" as "fantastic" and observed that "I have not been able to determine for myself what is back of it."

His remarks were made to reporters during a press conference in which he declared that C. Nelson Sparks, publisher of the so-called Hopkins letter, was "out in front as an agent" of isolationists who have launched "an effort to discredit any one who can possibly be discredited who believes in international co-operation after the war."

Mr. Ickes disclosed that President Roosevelt casually asked the Secretary yesterday who George N. Briggs, suspended Ickes aide, was. Mr. Ickes said he told the President "in general" about Mr. Briggs' background.

After leaving the grand jury room yesterday, Mr. Ickes was asked by newsmen if he had discussed the Hopkins' affair with the President. He replied, "no," and on further questioning added that only departmental matters came up at the White House meeting.

Expert in English.

The Secretary told reporters after his grand jury appearance yesterday that Mr. Briggs was an expert

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in the English language who handled Interior Department correspondence and writings for literary style.

Meanwhile, the Justice Department indicated it expects to hear some time today from Mr. Briggs. Subpoena servers sought Mr. Briggs at his Fairlington (Va.) home yesterday, but they found no one there. Mrs. Clare Briggs, widow of the cartoonist and sister-in-law of Mr. Briggs, reported he had gone to visit friends in Maryland in order to get away from the ringing of the telephone.

Mr. Sparks, former Akron Mayor, who is back in town to confer with Justice Department officials and possibly may appear again before the grand jury, announced he would hold a press conference at 3 p.m.



ICKES VISITS GRAND JURY—Secretary of Interior Ickes is shown tieless and with his right arm in a sling as he left District Court yesterday after testifying before a Federal grand jury investigating what he has termed "the Hopkins letter thriller." Mr. Ickes' collarbone was broken last Wednesday in a fall at his farm home.

—A. P. Photo.

today in the Senate press gallery. Mr. Sparks is the author of "One Man—Wendell Willkie," in which the Hopkins letter was published. Harry Hopkins, presidential adviser, has called the letter a forgery.

Ickes' Statement.

Mr. Ickes issued the following statement at his press conference today:

"I am beginning to see a very clear effort on the part of the isolationists—particularly that group organized in Chicago, the Republican Revivalist Committee, under the sponsorship of Col. Robert McCormick, before which Sparks spoke prior to coming to Washington to appear before the grand jury—beginning to see an effort to discredit any one who can possibly be discredited, who believes in international co-operation after the war.

"It seems that Mr. Sparks is in-

terested in activities not bearing on the matter before the grand jury. He seems to be out in front as an agent of that group.

"Whether the Hopkins letter episode is part of this effort I don't know. But I do say deliberately that Mr. Sparks is more interested in activities having a bearing on international affairs than he has on any purely domestic issue."

The Secretary told reporters that he came to meet Mr. Briggs because the man had connections with Frank Gannett, Rochester (N. Y.) publisher and a Republican stalwart. The Secretary would not elucidate because, he said, he had gone over the whole ground before the grand jury. He was asked if he met Mr. Briggs through Mayor Edward J. Kelly of Chicago. He replied:

"I would like to be excused from answering that question."

Sought Copy of Book.

The Secretary said he had asked Mr. Briggs to get him a copy of Mr. Sparks' book. It is known that Mr. Ickes was acquainted with the fact that Mr. Briggs knew Mr. Sparks, for whom the Secretary's suspended assistant worked in 1940 when Mr. Sparks was campaign manager for Mr. Gannett, who then was seeking the Republican presidential nomination.

Mr. Briggs' office at the Interior Department has been temporarily closed, Mr. Ickes said, adding that he was looking for a "first-rate man or woman" in Mr. Briggs' absence, though he said he did not mean that Mr. Briggs might not return to work for him.

"Who is your grammarian now?" a reporter asked Mr. Ickes.

"I am my own grammarian," Mr. Ickes said. "But I am looking for a first-grade man or woman."

Keeps Stationery Locked Up.

The Secretary said, "It isn't too difficult to get White House stationery," referring to the fact that the "Hopkins letter" was written on White House letter paper. He said his principal stenographer, who has served eight Secretaries of the Interior, keeps the stationery locked up, and it has to be obtained from him if it is obtained at the Interior Department.

The Secretary maintained throughout his conference the attitude that the case of the "Hopkins letter" is a mystery story.

He was asked if he knew what was meant by the use of the word "Alamo," which appeared in the correspondence allegedly sent by Mr. Briggs to Mr. Sparks and which was made public in the Senate Monday by Senator Langer, Republican, of North Dakota. Mr. Ickes said:

"It puzzles me. I've played with that thing and I just don't get it."

Mr. Briggs is expected to be summoned before the grand jury. The jury is not dealing with the "Hopkins letter" today, however, according to Justice Department officials.