

# Secretary Asks Jury to Summon Him in Inquiry

## Cancels Pay of Briggs After Langer Charges

Secretary of Interior Ickes today suspended without pay George N. Briggs, one of his assistants, "pending the outcome of the inquiry by the grand jury" into the so-called "Hopkins letter."

Mr. Ickes also announced he had asked permission to appear before the District grand jury investigating the letter. The Secretary said he knew nothing whatever about the "Hopkins letter," and doubted if he could shed much light on it, but declared:

"I do not relish the bandying about of my name in connection with a matter which seems to be as bizarre and absurd as it appears to be contemptible and vicious."

The names of Mr. Briggs and Mr. Ickes were brought into the complicated affair yesterday by Senator Langer, Republican, of North Dakota, who read to the Senate a series of letters which he said had been written by Mr. Briggs to C. Nelson Sparks, author of the book "One-Man-Wendell Willkie."

### Langer Accuses Briggs.

Senator Langer interpreted the correspondence as meaning that Mr. Briggs furnished to Mr. Sparks, for publication in the book, the letter purporting to have been signed by Harry Hopkins, adviser to President Roosevelt. Mr. Hopkins has denounced the letter as a forgery.

Senator Langer also interpreted the correspondence as indicating that Mr. Ickes himself had possession of the letter for a time.

Mr. Ickes today said: "I hope that the grand jury will soon find the person guilty of this hoax so as to be able to deal quickly and appropriately with him."

Henry A. Schweinhaut, special assistant to Attorney General Bidle, said there was "no doubt" in his mind that the "Hopkins letter" alleging to give views of Mr. Hopkins about the prospective presidential candidacy of Mr. Willkie this year, was a forgery.

Mr. Schweinhaut, commenting on the inquiry, predicted it would be "demonstrated" that the letter was

forged and stated in response to a question that he "wouldn't be surprised" if the person responsible was turned up.

### Briggs Not at Office.

Mr. Briggs did not appear at his office this morning but gave out a statement at his home at Fairlington, Va., accusing Senator Langer of attempting to smear Mr. Ickes.

Reporters noted that Mr. Briggs' typewriter and that if his secretary had been removed from his office at the Interior Department and learned that three men had taken them away. The Federal Bureau of Investigation said it had no comment on this matter.

Mr. Schweinhaut said he "imagined" Mr. Briggs would be called before the grand jury.

The Briggs statement said:

"This whole affair is a double-barreled blast at Secretary Ickes. It was the Secretary who as public works administrator had Bill Langer, then Governor of North Dakota, impeached for the misapplication of Federal funds.

"The other half of the gun barrel is occupied by the Patterson press, which is determined to wreck the Secretary of the Interior and it will destroy any one who gets in the way of its deadly purpose.

"Even if I had written everything that Sparks has released through the two channels that for years have been thirsting for Mr. Ickes' blood I would have a still greater contempt than I now feel for one who would furnish newspapers with photographs of private mail which purports as this does to deal with very personal matters."

Senator Langer inserted in the Congressional Record yesterday eight letters and six telegrams which he said were sent by Mr. Briggs—the letters on Interior Department stationery—to Mr. Sparks.

Mr. Briggs said that two of the eight letters read by Senator Langer were authentic.

### Inserted in Record.

One of the eight letters said Mr. Ickes was at one time in possession of the alleged Hopkins letter, which was addressed to Dr. Umphrey Lee, president of Southern Methodist

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University, Dallas, Tex., who is now in Washington. Mr. Ickes said:

"I don't know who will ultimately turn out to be the villain in the 'Hopkins letter' thriller, but it will not be I."

Mr. Briggs said a pamphlet he wrote in 1940 critical of Mr. Willkie was the foundation for the anti-Willkie book by Mr. Sparks. Mr. Briggs met Mr. Sparks during the 1940 pre-convention campaign, when Mr. Sparks was campaign manager for Frank Gannett, Rochester (N. Y.) publisher, who sought the Republican nomination, and Mr. Briggs was a publicity writer for Mr. Gannett.

### Reviews Correspondance.

Mr. Briggs, 55, went to work at the Interior Department in 1941. His job there is to review correspondence to be signed by Mr. Ickes. Born in Dixon, Ill., he is a former newspaperman who worked on the Chicago Tribune, the old Chicago Examiner and the St. Paul Pioneer Press.

Mr. Briggs said his 1940 anti-Willkie pamphlet charged that offers were made by representatives of Mr. Willkie to purchase delegations to the Republican Convention of that year. This charge, with specific reference to the Arizona delegation, is made by Mr. Sparks in his book.

Mr. Briggs said he did not know Dr. Lee, who has testified before the grand jury and is staying at the Raleigh Hotel. The grand jury is expected to hear more witnesses in the Hopkins letter case tomorrow. Dr. Lee denied receiving the letter.

### Demands Investigation.

Senator Langer sought to trace the "Hopkins letter's" peregrinations through the correspondence which he read on the Senate floor yesterday in a renewal of his demand that Mr. Willkie's 1940 nomination be investigated.

The gist of the Langer recital—all promptly denied by Mr. Ickes and other principals—was this:

That Mr. Hopkins wrote to Dr. Lee last fall predicting Mr. Willkie would be the Republican choice again this year and promising "good co-operation from that quarter."

That Mr. Briggs made a trip to the Southwest in an attempt to obtain the letter.

That the letter subsequently was forwarded here by a man identified by Senator Langer as Frank Phillips, president of the Phillips Petroleum Co., Bartlesville, Okla.

"I understand," Senator Langer told the Senate, "that this Mr. Frank Phillips of Oklahoma was a friend of Secretary Ickes, whom it appears Mr. Briggs was to get the letter from."

In New York, Mr. Phillips said last night, "I played no part in this affair. I never knew there was such a letter until I read about it in the papers.

"I don't know Hopkins, Lee or

any of the parties mentioned in the matter. I never met any of them in my life. \*However, I do know Mr. Ickes.

"I haven't the least idea what this is all about, and I never conversed with any one about it in either party. I will so testify before the grand jury in Washington."

Mr. Phillips said he had been asked to appear before the grand jury Friday.

"It must be some other Frank Phillips," he concluded: "There are lots of them, you know."

Informed of Senator Langer's comments, Dr. Lee declared:

"I don't know Mr. Phillips, Mr. Briggs or Mr. Ickes, and, of course, I never had a conference with any one of them."

#### Purports to Tell of Trip.

The correspondence purported to tell of a trip by Mr. Briggs to the Southwest last fall in an attempt to obtain the original from Dr. Lee or from Mr. Phillips, who, it was indicated, once had possession of it. Senator Langer later told reporters he obtained the photographs from Mr. Sparks.

Later, according to the alleged letters from Mr. Briggs to Mr. Sparks, the original letter arrived, sent by Mr. Phillips. Senator Langer read from Mr. Briggs' purported account of its arrival:

"The Phillips letter came in just as the boss was leaving to take a train \* \* \*. He asked for permission to take it with him—wanted to show it to some one he expects to see while away."

In commenting on this and other letters Senator Langer told the Senate it appeared to him that Mr. Phillips got the alleged Hopkins letter from Dr. Lee.

Subsequent letters which Senator Langer said Mr. Briggs wrote to Mr. Sparks indicated, the Senator said, that Mr. Briggs had difficulty getting the letter back from Mr. Ickes.

#### Afraid of Stalling.

The day after the November, 1943, election, Senator Langer said, Mr. Briggs wrote Mr. Sparks that he had discussed "our matter again with the Secretary and he confessed that he was afraid there was some stalling going on."

Senator Langer told the Senate that Mr. Ickes apparently lent the letter to some one else and quoted Mr. Briggs as writing Mr. Sparks:

"If the letter is not here Monday he (Mr. Ickes) is going to get on the long distance and raise some hell around the country. Meanwhile, he will swear that he saw the letter if it comes to a showdown. I hope that it won't be necessary to put him on the spot, because he has enough trouble without that."

Senator Langer said the Hopkins letter, which he urged the Senate Elections Committee to investigate along with an inquiry into whether there were "irregularities" in connection with Mr. Willkie's nomination for the presidency by the Republicans in 1940, read as follows:

"Dear Umphrey:

"What has been done in the \* \* \*

(blotted) matter? Will you write me, please? What developments in the other situation? Willkie is going to be the man in my opinion, and I can promise you good co-operation from that quarter if you think it would be helpful."

#### Says Blotted Word was "Alamo."

Senator Langer said Dr. Lee was a possible candidate against Senator Connally, Democrat, of Texas and that the blotted word was "Alamo."

Senator Langer said that under date of November 16, Mr. Briggs wrote Mr. Sparks that "the Secretary has had word from Texas, the burden of which is that the word 'Alamo' will be very embarrassing, and the boss has asked that it be deleted."

"He (the boss) says if it is used, he is afraid Dr. Lee won't stand up now," the alleged letter continued. "He is working on that now; also to

get the letter himself which I think will be made easier as soon as you give me assurance that 'Alamo' won't be used."

One of the alleged letters told of an alleged conference between Mr. Briggs and Dr. Lee. Senator Langer quoted Mr. Briggs as writing as early as October 15:

"I had my meeting with Dr. Umphrey Lee, and I am inclosing herewith a copy of the Hopkins letter which I read and was assured by Dr. Lee that the original would be made available for our use within the next week or 10 days. It will come through those sources I disclosed to you."

#### Unable to Get Letter."

It was on October 9 that Mr. Briggs allegedly wrote to Mr. Sparks that he had been unable to get the original letter, but that it "will be here next week on the word of Mr. Phillips, who is coming East and will bring it."

Other correspondence read by Senator Langer included a letter on November 24 asserting:

"The heat has been put on the Secretary from the Southwest. When it was learned that use had been made of the Hopkins letter, there was great hullabaloo and much consternation. The Secretary called me in and said not to be surprised at some pretty strong statements, but to 'sit tight and say nothing'."

Secretary Ickes in his statement yesterday said:

"I am the best reader of mystery stories in the world. I never try to put my finger on the villain until the author leads me right up to him. But there is one common pattern that I have discerned in mystery stories. The author directs the reader's suspicions to a lot of innocent persons until the last chapter.

"I don't know who will ultimately turn out to be the villain in the 'Hopkins letter' thriller, but it will not be I.

"I do know Mr. Briggs but I do not know Mr. Sparks. I do not know Dr. Umphrey Lee.

"Until I read 'One Man' I never heard of the letter. Neither Briggs nor Mr. Frank Phillips nor any-

body else had ever mentioned such a letter to me. Apparently there never was any such authentic letter, but a rank amateurish attempt at forgery; one that from the time that I read it in 'One Man' never made any sense to me. It would seem that some one has been trying to play unfunny tricks at some one's else expense. Mr. Harry Hopkins, Mr. Willkie and I all seem to be involved.

"The author of this silliest of mystery stories will tell us in the last chapter who the real villain is, and you can bet I'll read it."