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Hearings Expected on Inspection of Overseas Mail

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WASHINGTON, March 30 — Both houses of Congress are expected to hold hearings within the next few weeks on proposed regulations that would authorize the opening of mail from overseas without the recipient's permission, as currently required.

The recent postal strike disrupted planned hearings by the Senate Post Office and Civil Service Committee. And the questions of postal pay reform are still the primary concern of that committee and its equivalent in the House.

However, Senator Gale W. McGee, the Wyoming Democrat who is chairman of the Senate committee, has gone on record as opposing the new regulations and is considering a bill to forbid any Federal employe to open first class mail without a warrant from a Federal judge.

Representative William D. Ford, Democrat of Michigan, has asked a House subcommittee to hold hearings on the proposed regulations. Mr. Ford is a member of the House Post Office and Civil Service Committee. He stated today, in a telephone interview, that he was against the regulations, which "completely destroy the integrity of the mails."

The proposed regulations would require that postal officials turn over any overseas mail suspected of containing prohibited matter to local customs officials, who would then open it.

No Decision Yet

The Post Office and Treasury Departments published the proposed regulation changes on Feb. 3, but no final decision on them has yet been reached. The regulations would be di-

rected at stopping the growing flow of pornography mailed into this country, according to a Post Office Department spokesman. They would also be used to curb the arrival of other illegal items, such as lottery tickets.

Mr. Ford said that he opposed such regulations because "under the guise of checking for pornography, the Government can read my mail."

He said that such action would be repugnant to most people, even though the reasoning behind it might have appeal to those opposed to pornography.

Among the questions the

Congressman wants answered at the forthcoming hearings are: What does an inspector do if he comes across something in the mails that is illegal but not pornographic? What in the regulation will keep the Postmaster General from enlarging the scope of items that cannot be sent through the mail?

Government sources indicated that the Customs Bureau had always considered that it had the right to open any mail entering the country, except for diplomatically protected items. And some sources hinted that the bureau might have been opening mail for some time.

The Post Office has said that overseas mail is technically Universal Postal Union mail and not first class mail and does not have the protections of the latter.

But some members of Congress have expressed the belief that American citizens have the right to expect such sealed mail to be treated as first class mail.

And sources close to Senator McGee said that he would change his proposed legislation to cover such mail if he found that the Post Office or Customs Bureau did give it less protection than domestic first class mail.