

Many House Democrats Critical of New Leaders



United Press International
Carl Albert
Speaker of the House



Associated Press
Hale Boggs
House majority leader

By **MARJORIE HUNTER**
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WASHINGTON, June 6 — During a major floor fight this spring, Representative John Conyers Jr., a Michigan Democrat, glanced around the chamber, then rose to his feet.

"Reluctantly," he said, "I make the observation that our leadership is not present at a time when we are considering one of the most important measures that could come before this body.

"As one member on this side of the aisle, I resent it."

His rebuke of his leaders was symptomatic of the growing disillusionment of many House Democrats in the four months since Carl Albert of Oklahoma became Speaker and Hale Boggs of Louisiana became majority leader.

Many of the complaints are reminiscent of those sounded by young liberals during the years when the aging John W. McCormack of Massachusetts was Speaker and Mr. Albert and Mr. Boggs were his two chief lieutenants.

There are complaints that the leaders, either intentionally or through lack of forcefulness, have blocked action on party positions by failing to assure a quorum, three months in a row, at the Democratic Caucus.

There are complaints that the leaders have failed to push for new solutions to old problems, relying instead on shopworn alternatives to proposals of the Nixon Administration.

And there are complaints that the leaders have frequently misread the strength of the opposition.

The most recent example of this came a few weeks ago when the well-disciplined Republican minority, joined by some Southern Democrats, succeeded in opening the way for later consideration of an Administration revenue-sharing plan as an alternative to a Democratic bill to create public service jobs for the unemployed.

The result was that the Democratic leaders, after a hasty consultation, postponed further consideration of the jobs bill in hopes of picking up strength to block the Nixon plan in a showdown.

Many dismiss the complaints of liberal insurgents—such as Mr. Conyers of the Black Caucus and Bella Abzug of Manhattan, who is a critic of the war as the mouthings of the more "radical wing" of the party.

The Democratic ranks in the house appear as fractured as they were during Mr. McCormack's regime, but Mr. Albert has persistently sought to bridge the gap between the factions.

He has been more available to discuss grievances with the young liberals than his predecessor was. He had sought—and in some cases succeeded—in gaining key committee slots for younger members.

Committees Prodded

Along with committee chairmen, he has staged almost weekly news conferences to endorse and explain "Democratic alternatives" to Administration programs.

And while the legislative output during the last four months has been relatively meager, he has prodded committees to produce bills for floor action.

Yet, dissatisfaction with the new Democratic leadership appears to go far deeper than the complaints of the younger anti-Establishment members.

Even some of the older House Democrats have expressed concern privately over indecisiveness by the Speaker and socializing by the majority leader.

News accounts earlier this spring reported that Mr. Boggs had been knocked to the floor during a heated argument with a former Congressman at the annual dinner of the Gridiron Club, an organization of newsmen.

Another news account from Florida reported that Mr. Boggs had become "loud and boisterous" when he showed up for a speech in Panama City, and, according to some guests, had to be forcibly restrained.

About that same time, Mr. Boggs stunned a number of the nation's mayors who had dropped by his office to discuss the Administration's plans for revenue sharing.

As Mayor Lindsay of New York rose to speak for the group, Mr. Boggs reportedly slammed his fist on his desk and shouted: "You don't need to make any points. Revenue sharing is dead. I'll see that it never passes. So let's get on to something else."

Mr. Boggs also stunned the House earlier this spring when he strode to the well of the chamber and, his face flushed

and his voice resounding hoarsely, accused the Federal Bureau of Investigation and its director, J. Edgar Hoover, of tapping telephones of members of Congress—a charge that he did not prove.

This incident prompted Deputy Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst to suggest during a national television interview that Mr. Boggs was either "sick or . . . not in possession of his faculties."

Mr. Albert, usually mild-mannered and soft-spoken, has also shown signs of strain in trying to run a Democratic-controlled House during a Republican Administration.

Without even consulting his closest friends in the House, he sought in recent days to halt funding for a new Library of Congress building, arguing that the site should be reserved for a possible future House Office Building.

In refusing even to consider his plea, the House Appropriations Committee dealt him his most stunning defeat since he became Speaker.

Some long-time members have also complained privately that Mr. Albert is prone to indecisiveness at times.

During the May Day demonstrations on the Capitol steps last month, one House member urged him to halt the mass arrests by the police and allow the young demonstrators to leave peacefully.

For a few minutes, the Speaker wavered. Then, his mind apparently made up, he called out: "Where's the Chief?"

"It's too late to make such an announcement," James Powell, chief of the Capitol Police, told him. The arrests continued.

Some guests on the Washington social circuit have also said that Mr. Albert has been unusually garrulous at some gatherings in recent months. Others have noted that he has been short-tempered at times.

Seeking some rest, he left town for a brief vacation over the Easter recess. Twice during that time, Vice President Agnew telephoned his office, seeking to discuss some matter. Both times, the Speaker's staff said that he could not be reached.

The Speaker is third in line for the Presidency—right behind the Vice President.

Elections 18 Months Off

Upon his return, Mr. Albert insisted that there was "not a time I was unavailable in case of national emergency."

"If my staff had upset my vacation, which had been done before, there would have been an emergency in my office," he added.

Some of the edginess of the House leaders is no doubt attributable to the burden of trying to harmonize the various party factions into an articulate Democratic voice in the 18 months before the national elections of 1972.

The job is not confined to the House, where Southerners speak with one voice, the Black caucus with another and elderly committee chairmen rule while younger members fidget.

The problem goes far deeper. Although Mr. Albert and the Senate majority leader, Mike Mansfield of Montana, are on cordial terms, until now there has been little if any effort on the part of either leader to coordinate party positions.

Thus, even with a new Democratic leadership team in the House, there still exists much the same lack of rapport between the House and Senate that existed when Mr. McCormack, the tall, gaunt and dignified Bostonian, was "Mr. Speaker."