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1953

THE NEED FOR AN UN-AMERICAN ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE IN CONGRESS

One of the most controversial subjects in Congress is the Un-American Activities Committee. I am pleased to have this opportunity of giving you my views on why we need such a committee in the Legislative Branch of our government.

As a member of the House of Representatives, my remarks will deal for the most part with the activities and organization of the Committee on Un-American Activities on the House side. The arguments I propose, however, do apply, to my way of thinking, to the comparable organizational committee on the Senate side called the Internal Security Sub-committee of the Judiciary Committee. The Senate Committee is headed by Senator William E. Jenner of Indiana. On the House side the Chairman of the Un-American Activities Committee is Congressman Harold Velde of Illinois. These two committees are specifically designated by Congress with the responsibility of ferreting out any Un-American and subversive group in the United States.

I am sure many of you are now inquiring, "What about Senator Joe McCarthy?" Senator McCarthy is the Chairman of the Committee on Government operations and Chairman of the Sub-committee entitled, Senate Sub-committee on Investigations. The distinction here seems to be that Senator McCarthy's activities are restricted to the functions of the Executive Branch of our government.



This, then, is the general outline of the legislative committees' dealing with Un-American activities. The question is asked, "Do we have any need for a committee or committees in Congress to investigate and expose subversive activities by persons in the U.S.?" Without hesitation I answer the question in the affirmative. Here are the reasons for my answer and they shall be restricted to the functions of the House Committee on Un-American Activities with which I am familiar as a member of the House of Representatives.

The powers and duties of the committee are specifically outlined in Public Law 601, 79th Congress, passed in 1946. I quote:

"The Committee on Un-American Activities, as a whole or by subcommittee, is authorized to make from time to time investigations of (1) the extent, character, and objects of Un-American propaganda activities in the United States. (2) the diffusion within the United States of subversive and Un-American propaganda that is instigated from foreign countries or of a domestic origin and attacks the principle of the form of government as guaranteed by our Constitution, and (3) all other questions in relation thereto that would aid Congress in any necessary remedial legislation."

You may ask, and rightly so, why is there a need for the committee as long as we have the FBI? I have asked this question of the present chairman of



the House Committee, Mr. Velde. As a former FBI agent, Mr. Velde is in a good position to give us an answer. He states that the FBI is a fact-finding organization. For the most part the investigations of the FBI are never made public. The only exception is in the case of prosecution by the Justice Department. In other words, from the important standpoint of keeping the American people informed of the dangers of Communist and subversive activities, the only forum available is the Committee on Un-American activities. Certainly no one will argue with the proposition that safeguarding our rights and liberties depends to the greatest extent on a well-informed citizenry.

The history of the House Committee is interesting and affords the best evidence for the need of such an organization. I am sure you all recall the hectic decade in our history from 1930 to 1940. It was during this period that the Congress began to take notice of activities by persons completely foreign to our republican form of government. The great depression afforded Communism and Fascism fertile fields for growth. Although there were some special committees which dealt with specific problems before 1938, this was the year in which Congressman Martin Dies of Texas was named Chairman of the first ^{Attorney} Un-American Committee.

The Dies Committee as it has been referred to, was active as a temporary committee from 1938 through 1944. In the 79th Congress, 1945, action was taken



giving the committee permanent standing. It has remained a permanent committee until the present time.

The fundamental or basic question involved in this problem is whether our country could afford to be without a Committee on Un-American Activities. Both from the standpoint of past history and present activities of various persons and groups I cannot see how this would be possible. It is an undeniable fact that Communists teach and advocate the overthrow and destruction of the United States. The problem is a complex one. Legislation is difficult to formulate to solve all our problems, without endangering many of our constitutional freedoms. Indeed, the question is asked, "What legislation has resulted from hearings by the committee?" Frankly, very little legislation has resulted with the possible exception of the passage of the Internal Security Act of 1950.

Can we say that the singular test of the need for a Committee on Un-American activities is the amount of legislation which results from their activities? I think not. If I were asked to enumerate the primary tasks of a legislative body they would be as follows:

1. Law-making
2. Fact finding
3. Supervising all three branches of the government
4. Keeping the citizens informed.



As a practical matter most of our congressional committees hear and evaluate a great many subjects that never result in any positive legislation. This does not mean that the committees are not doing a competent job but rather that the facts deduced do not warrant legislative action.

A hurried glance at the record of the 1st session of the 83rd Congress will help us understand this important principle. The facts show that a total of 10,695 measures were introduced in the House and Senate. Out of this total only 505 of the measures became law. A total of 835 reports have been filed in the Senate and 1,094 filed in the House. In many cases these reports merely stated the evidence as presented. The fact that legislation did not result from many of the hearings does not in the least mitigate against the importance of the committee hearings. No wise and intelligent legislation can ever result unless the members of Congress are adequately informed of all the facts on a given situation.

In defense of the committee and my position that we need such a forum, it strikes me that the ultimate good far outweighs the evil. In this respect I should like to quote the opinion rendered by Professor Robert E. Carr in his book entitled, "The House Committee on Un-American Activities," published by Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York in 1952:



"Among the committee's achievements attention must first be called to the undeniable contribution it has made to the American people's understanding of the character and purpose of international Communism. As one rereads today the record of the Browder-Foster hearings in 1945, the Budenz testimony of 1946 and later years, and the committee reports on the Communist Party published in 1947 and 1948, it must be acknowledged that the committee was shedding light upon the revolutionary aims of international communism at a time when many Americans were inclined to believe that the Communists were content to confine their experiment to the Soviet Union and that Communism and democracy could live together peacefully in the same world.--"

"Secondly, the committee has helped to educate the American people concerning the purposes and methods of our own domestic Communist movement. Through the years the committee hearings and reports have revealed much factual information concerning the tactics used by Communists in establishing cells in the government service, in obtaining important business posts such as in the motion picture industry, in infiltrating and controlling labor unions, in establishing Communist front organizations, or in capturing other organizations originally non-Communist in character.--"



"Thirdly, the committee has undoubtedly played a part in the exposure of the espionage activities of Communist agents in the United States. It is seemingly true that neither Alger Hiss nor William Remington would ever have been prosecuted had it not been for the investigations of the committee, although it should be noted that in each instance the prosecution was for perjury rather than espionage;"

In conclusion we must all remember that our republican form of government is the greatest safeguard against any abuse of power by the Committee on Un-American Activities. The responsibility of all citizens to constantly evaluate and scrutinize their government officials is a serious obligation. If we all perform our duties in this regard, I am sure we will have no need to fear a Committee on Un-American Activities.

