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THE CONGRESSIONAL FRONT  
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WASHINGTON LOBBYISTS.

Last week, when it appeared that the votes were lacking to pass the so-called Patman Housing Bill as it was reported by the Committee on Banking and Currency of the House of Representatives, Majority Leader McCormick, stated in a speech on the House floor that a powerful "lobby" was at work to bring about the defeat of the bill. In the days that followed while the bill was still under discussion, various radio commentators hinted broadly at a powerful lobby which was at work and urged people to deluge Congress with telegrams. Few telegrams appeared. Each day during the debate, that word "lobby" was freely bandied about. It is an old gag. It's an old device with which to smear a person, a group or a legislative measure. Its use is so very very common and is very definitely based upon the idea of frightening the opponents of a bill on a course of action.

WHAT IS A LOBBY.

First let's get a satisfactory definition of a lobby or a lobbyist. Now, you're all familiar with a hotel lobby. It's a place where the guests of the hotel congregate and also where the public congregates. People often arrange to meet in a hotel lobby. It is, therefore, a place where people meet. Theatres have lobbies. State Capitols have lobbies. And the national Capitol where Congress meets has a lobby. That is to say, there are hallways, rooms, and corridors where members can meet people when they are called from the floor. These spaces can be called lobbies in a certain sense. Thus it was when Webster compiled the dictionary that he defined a "lobbyist" as one who frequents a legislative lobby to meet a legislator. Later on, the term took on another meaning. It was applied to one who tried to "lobby" or influence or persuade a public official to do a certain thing or support a certain bill. Strictly speaking then, any person who might accost a Congressman in one of the corridors and speak to him about a bill would be a "lobbyist."

ACTIVITIES OF LOBBYISTS.

Now, just how active and how effective are lobbyists in Washington? They have no effect or influence whatsoever and moreover, people who are genuinely interested in some cause do not work that way. Let's take an example or two. Bill Hushing is a fine, affable, capable legislative representative of the American Federation of Labor. Does he buttonhole Congressmen in a "lobby" and solicit their vote? He does not. He appears openly before a Committee of Congress and testifies for or against a bill. Often he or the A.F. of L. sends a memorandum setting forth its reasons for or against a bill. If he wishes to have a personal visit with a member, he telephones for an appointment. The C.I.O. does likewise. The farm organizations follow the same procedure. They have a program. They know what they want and they fight openly and above board. The idea of slinky, stealthy lobbyists, frequenting the halls and corridors in Washington is a myth out of some story tellers brain. No member would pay any attention to them.

THE REAL LOBBY IF ANY

IS WHAT MIGHT BEST BE CALLED the "government lobby." It consists of heads of bureaus who try to get their appropriations increased or to have restrictions eliminated from the legislative authority under which they operate. It consists also of administrative heads in government who get persons on the Federal payroll to wire or write Congressmen and Senators for or against certain bills. Only recently the author of the FRONT received scores of telegrams against the transfer of the U.S. Employment Services back to the states. A check-up disclosed that these telegrams all carried the same text and came from employees on the Federal payroll who sought to defeat this proposal. The cry of a powerful "lobby" seeking to defeat or bring about the enactment of a bill is one of those bugaboos which is regularly resorted to by those who are not sure of their case.