

[March 19, 1938]

THE CONGRESSIONAL FRONT.  
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WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THIS? The American Youth Commission interviewed 6500 young men to ascertain what they would do if war came. Here's the score: Out of every 10 American boys between the ages of 16 and 25, 3 would volunteer to fight, 3 would go when drafted, 1 would fight if invasion were threatened, 1 would refuse to fight under any circumstances, and 2 wouldn't know what they would do. The Commission added this very sage note to its report: "When the martial music starts, young people will do what they don't anticipate at present."

THE REORGANIZATION FUSS. One of the principal points of controversy in the bill to reorganize the executive branch of the government, which is now raging in the Senate is the proposal to change the functions and powers of the Comptroller General. But to properly appreciate it, a bit of background is necessary. There are 10 Cabinet departments and scores of independent agencies of government. Each Cabinet department such as Agriculture or Commerce is made up of dozens of bureaus. In October or November of each year, each of these make up an estimate showing the amount of money they will need to operate their departments during the next fiscal year. These estimates are then presented to the Budget Bureau. The Bureau then takes testimony on these items and prepares a complete Budget for the entire government for the following year. This budget is then discussed with the President. Changes and modifications are made and the Budget is then presented to Congress at the beginning of each regular session. The Budget message is referred to the Appropriations Committee, hearings are held, department heads examined, after which the Congress makes up and reports appropriation bills to cover all departments and agencies. All this is in conformity with the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921. After the appropriations have been made, the government agencies are then ready to spend the money so made available by Congress. Every dollar must be spent in accordance with the law. Now somebody must determine whether expenditures are legally made. That somebody is the Comptroller General, who holds office for 15 years, who cannot be removed except by Congress, and who with a staff of 2500 persons audits virtually all claims, bills, vouchers and expenditures and determines their legality. If any government officer spends money for an unauthorized purpose, the Comptroller can hold up the check, fail to approve payment, or compel restitution if already paid. The Comptroller is therefore a powerful official and can make life very unpleasant for government officers. In the reorganization bill is a proposal to do away with the Comptroller General, substitute an Auditor General in his place, who will be responsible to the President instead of Congress and whose powers will consist chiefly of auditing the bills after the money has been spent rather than before. Hence, the fuss and it's a real fuss.

MORE WATER FOR ILLINOIS RIVER - OR NO? Under a decree of the Supreme Court, the Chicago Sanitary District must cut the flow of water from Lake Michigan into the Illinois River from 5000 cubic feet per second to 1500 cubic feet per second. Commercial users of the Illinois River for shipping purposes fear that this reduction will provide insufficient water for a waterway with a 9-foot depth and have requested Congressman Parsons of Illinois to introduce a bill to increase the diversion to 5000 cubic feet per second. Hearings were held before the Rivers and Harbors Committee. The Secretary of War opposes the bill on the ground that the War Department is spending millions of dollars on the three dams at Peoria, Versailles, and Alton to provide the necessary depth. The Secretary of State opposes it on the ground that increased diversion would violate our treaty obligations with Canada. Chances of passage of the bill are therefore slender indeed.

GHOSTS OF THE PAST. In the course of the voluminous debate on the Super-Navy program, it seems generally agreed that present world troubles spring from the peace treaty of Versailles signed June 28, 1919 under which the United States received exactly nothing. Just by way of refreshing the memory, this treaty contains 440 sections, covers 537 pages, and imposed nearly every restriction on the vanquished nations which could possibly be conceived. In the 19 years since the treaty was made, scarcely a single provision has been carried out. What a sad commentary on the vision of those statesmen who sought to crown the world's greatest war with a treaty that was to bring assurances of continuing peace.

FOR THE SAKE OF ACCURACY. In case anyone is under the impression that the Farm Bill of 1938 automatically provides for parity payments, it should be pointed out that parity payments (that is cash payments out of the Treasury to give basic farm commodities the same purchasing power which they had in the five year period 1909-1914) are conditioned on the amount of money appropriated by Congress. For verification, examine the language of Section 303 of the bill. Estimates are that benefit payments for soil conservation practices will require \$440,000,000 annually while full parity payments for cotton, rice, corn-hogs, wheat, and tobacco, will require \$1,000,000,000 annually.

WAGES AND HOURS BILL. There may be a wage and hour bill at this session of Congress and that reminds us that certain industrial locating companies in northern states are carried on the payrolls of certain southern states. Their business is to get manufacturing concerns to move south. The argument used for moving south is lower wages, no labor difficulties. This helps to understand the hostility of the south against a wage-hour bill which carries a flat minimum of 40¢ per hour. They want to retain their present advantage.