
SAM HOBBS SUBMITS A BILL.

The Hon. Sam Hobbs, of Selma, Alabama, long-time lawyer, former judge and now serving his 6th term in Congress submitted a bill to Congress in early 1942 which has become familiarly known as the Hobbs Bill and which is quite generally referred to as the Anti-Racketeering Bill. It provoked considerable controversy. It met with strong opposition from labor leaders. No action was taken in 1942 and the bill was re-introduced on January 6th 1943. It was reported to the House for action on January 28, 1943 and came before Congress for action on April 8.

TESTIMONY

Hearings were held on this measure beginning on April 2, 1942. They cover 428 pages. Fruit growers, truck drivers, representatives of farm organizations, representatives of labor organizations, of business organizations, of the Attorney General's office and others testified at length. The testimony is not only informative but in many cases most astonishing.

BACKGROUND OF THE BILL.

How and why was the Hobbs Bill introduced? A bit of history furnishes the answer. In 1934, Congress passed and the President approved a bill known as "An Act to protect trade and commerce against interference by violence, threats, coercion or intimidation." It became law on June 18, 1934. In 1941, the Attorney General of the United States brought an action under this law against Local Union No. 807 of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and Chauffeurs and 26 of its members for compelling out-of-state truckers to turn their trucks over to union teamsters when entering New York City. It appears that when truckers who were hauling vegetables, milk, fruit and other produce from New Jersey to New York City via the Holland Tunnel, members of Local No. 807 would climb aboard and demand that the trucker pay \$9.42 for each large truck and \$8.41 for each small truck before they could proceed into or through the city. In the language of the Supreme Court, "there was sufficient evidence to warrant a finding that the defendants conspired to use and did use violence and threats to obtain from the owners of these 'over-the-road' trucks \$9.42 for each large truck and \$8.41 for each small truck entering the city." The members of Local 807 did not unload or service the trucks. They merely went along with it and demanded this fee for permission to enter the city. The defendants were convicted in the lower court. The case then went to the Federal Circuit of Appeals which reversed the convictions and the case came to the U. S. Supreme Court on a writ of certiorari.

THE COURT SPEAKS.

The majority opinion of the Court was written by Justice James Byrnes, who is presently serving as the Director of Stabilization. By a 6 to 1 vote the members of local 807 and the organization itself was acquitted in the following language: "The jury (in the lower court) was bound to acquit the defendants if it found that their objectives and purpose was to obtain by the use of threat of violence, the chance to work for money but to accept money even if the employers refused to permit them to work" The Court also said that "This does not mean that such activities are beyond the reach of federal legislative control." In other words, the Court held that this type of activity was not intended by Congress to be included in the provisions of the Act of 1934.

THUS CAME THE HOBBS BILL.

To remedy this situation, the Hobbs Bill was introduced. In brief, it provides a penalty of not more than 20 years in prison or a \$10,000 fine or both for robbery, extortion, the obstruction of interstate commerce by robbery or extortion, for conspiracy to rob or extort, for attempted robbery or extortion, for violence or threatened violence in pursuing a plan to rob or extort or for wilful obstruction of interstate commerce in time of war.

THE A. F. of L. SUGGESTS AN AMENDMENT.

On March 15, the American Federation of Labor announced it's acceptance of the Hobbs Bill if it were amended to provide that no acts, conduct or activities which are deemed lawful under the National Labor Relations Act, the Railway Labor Act, the Norris LaGuardia Act and the Anti-Trust Act would constitute a violation of the provisions of the Hobbs Bill. The Judiciary Committee on the other hand suggested an amendment to the effect that the provisions of the Hobbs Bill shall not be construed to repeal or modify any of the provisions of the foregoing acts. Good legal minds in the Congress differed on the effect of the two amendments. Some contended that their import was the same. Others contended that they were dissimilar in effect.

THE HOUSE ACTS.

On Friday April 9th at 5:30 P. M. the House acted. The committee amendment to the effect that the bill should not be construed to modify the various labor acts previously enacted was adopted. The bill then came on for final passage and by a vote of 270 to 107 was passed. This, then is the story of the Hobbs Bill.