

6/8/46

-----  
BIOGRAPHY OF A CEILING.

There are ceilings and ceilings. Over the years, we've become quite familiar with that word. There are price ceilings and wage ceilings. There are production ceilings and personnel ceilings. This is the story of a ceiling that may not be a ceiling after all. When the House of Representatives had completed action on the annual appropriation Bill for the Department of Agriculture and sent it to the Senate, that very august body considered the bill for quite a while and then added 25 million dollars, making the over-all total of funds appropriated about 600 million dollars for the fiscal year 1947. Of course, more money means more Federal employees unless the money is to be spent for materials or supplies or some other purpose. And to make sure that the extra money could be used for additional Federal employees, the Senate hooked a very harmless looking amendment to the Bill which provided in effect that the Federal Pay Act of 1946 should not apply to any extra personnel that might be required to do the work that was authorized by such increased appropriations.

THE FEDERAL PAY ACT.

So, to find out what this is all about, we must go back and take a look at the Federal Pay Act. It's only three weeks ago, that Congress completed action on that Act and sent it to the President for signature. That Act contained a provision which for a time at least, became known as the DIRKSEN AMENDMENT. It was added to the Bill during its consideration in the House. It provided in brief that any pay increases for Federal employees to offset increased living costs should be offset by a reduction in the number of employees on the Federal rolls. In other words, it was an answer to the long-standing demand for a reduction in what has become commonly known as government "Bureaucracy." The House and Senate conference committee which finally whipped the Bill into shape, took that amendment and revised it so as to establish personnel ceilings beyond which, the various agencies of government could not go without specific authority from Congress. In other words, there should be a gradual reduction in the number of employees so that on June 30, 1947 - a year from now - the whole number should not exceed 1,610,000. That would mean a reduction of 800,000 persons on the Federal rolls between now and next June. It must be admitted that that would be a pretty healthy and substantial reduction, and the only question which then arose was whether it could be made to stick. Certain agencies of government were excepted so that no undue hardship would be worked upon those agencies whose fixed or growing workload required additional personnel.

NOW COMES THE SENATE.

So, with this personnel ceiling in effect, now comes the Senate and adds 25 million to an appropriation Bill which would obviously mean that additional personnel would have to be hired and would mean a lifting of the ceiling. How to do it? That seemed quite simple. Those deft experts in the use of parliamentary language simply added an amendment which provided that the personnel ceiling in the Federal Pay Act should not apply. In other words, within three weeks after the ceiling on personnel was established by both Houses of Congress, it was now proposed to give the ceiling a kick in the pants. As this is written, no final action has been taken and it remains to be seen whether the conference committee which is now laboring on this Bill provides the answer to that all-engrossing question of "When is a ceiling not a ceiling." I have a hunch that the ceiling will be preserved.