

[ca. August 21, 1937]

THE CONGRESSIONAL FRONT.
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ARMISTICE ON THE CONGRESSIONAL FRONT. At a late hour on Saturday, August 21st, 1937, after the last speech had died away on the evening air, and after the last felicitations had been extended to one another, the Speaker of the House of Representatives rapped for order and then intoned, "In pursuance of the provisions of House Concurrent Resolution, I declare the first session of the 75th Congress adjourned sine die." The gavel fell with a bold stroke. There was moment of silence as the full import of that resolution struck home, followed by a wild and tumultuous shout. Congress was over. The membership could now go home. The legislative machinery had come to a sudden standstill. The legislative grist mill from which flowed hundreds of diverse laws was shut down. An armistice had been declared on the Congressional Front. All became suddenly quiet on the Congressional front.

L'ENVOI. With the adjournment of the first session of the 75th Congress, the "Congressional Front" comes to a close until Congress re-convenes in January of 1938. For five years, the "Congressional Front" has been going forth to the newspapers in all parts of Illinois. Its existence is possible because of the kindly and courteous manner in which editors have accorded space in their newspapers. We fondly hope that it has been informative. We hope that at times it has contained a modicum of entertainment. We hope that it has served to bring the legislative branch of the government a little closer to the readers. If in small degree, it has achieved any or all of these objectives, the author of the Congressional Front will feel richly rewarded for whatever effort it has required. When fighting is resumed on the Congressional Front in January next, we hope to resume this chronicle of activities in the nation's capital.

RESUME. The activities of Congress, extending over a period of eight months, makes a rather fragmentary pattern until it's all classified and put together much after the manner of a jigsaw puzzle. Congress is so often reproached for its sins of omission and commission, that a birds eye view of the happenings of the last eight months may serve to soften the reproaches and develop a bit of appreciation and understanding. The session officially convened on January 3rd 1937 and lasted for nearly eight months. It is the first time in our history that a new Congress embarked upon a session before the inaugural of the President. This came about as a result of the 21st amendment to the Constitution which abolished the so-called "lame-duck" sessions and set the date for meeting in January and the date for the inauguration of the President on the 20th day of January. Heretofore the President was inaugurated on March 4th. Congress was not in session. The President had ample time to make his appointments, get details in order, prepare his message to Congress for the first Monday in December and give the legislators a hint of the program. All that is changed and some confusion has resulted from the change. For instance, in other years, Appropriation Bills were prepared by the Appropriation Committee after complete hearings, reported to Congress for action and disposed of within a few months. As the situation developed in this Congress, overshadowed, as it was by the inaugural, little action on these bills could take place until after the President had delivered his message to Congress and the leaders had taken stock of the program ahead. Thus it happened that some of the appropriation bills which were to provide funds for governmental departments beginning with July 1, were not passed until after that date. Government workers in those departments continued to receive their pay only because Congress adopted a resolution to bridge the gap until the regular Appropriation Bill could be enacted. In the event of a change in the Presidency in the future, there is bound to be so much confusion because of the shortness of the time between November when a President is elected and January when a Congress convenes and the President is inaugurated, that a great demand will be made to go back to some modified system that will provide more time for a new President to make his appointments, get his house in order, and then deliver his message to Congress on the State of the Union.

APPROXIMATE STATISTICS. The present Congress was quite vocal. In its eight months of existence, the Congressional Record grew to 12,000 pages, not including the vast amount of speeches that will be inserted in the Record after the session is over. About 8500 bills were introduced in the House and 3000 in the Senate. In addition, more than 1000 assorted resolutions were dropped in the hopper. About 800 of this number will become law. About half of the measures enacted relate to private claims and pensions and the other 400 to matters of public interest. The 400 or more public measures will include many bills that are public in nature but local in application. It will include such things as authorizations to build bridges over navigable streams, Indian Claims, supervision of public lands, bills dealing with irrigation and reclamation, etc. so that the number of laws of general application which are policy-forming in nature will be comparatively small.

HIGHLIGHTS. APPROPRIATIONS. Of immediate, general and poignant interest of course is the age-old question: How much did Congress spend? The answer is: plenty. Continued demands upon the government and the creation of new governmental functions means a steady increase in expenditures. Briefly, the present Congress appropriated \$7,176,967,405. More than seven billion dollars is a lot of money. In round numbers, this includes 630 million for agriculture, 46 million for the District of Columbia, 957 million for the executive and independent agencies of government, 24 million for the legislative branch, 133 million for the Interior Department, 516 million for the Navy, 19 million for the State Department, 41 million for the Department of Justice and the Judicial branch of the government, 24 million for the Labor Department, 719 million for the Treasury, 784 million for the Post Office Department, 610 million for the War Department (of which 415 million is for military purposes), making a total of $4\frac{1}{2}$ billions for the regular establishments of government. Now, add to that $1\frac{1}{2}$ billion for relief. In addition, nearly $1\frac{1}{2}$ billion was carried in three deficiency appropriation bills so that the total for the session exceeds 7000 million dollars.

CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS. Four years ago, when the CCC camps were first suggested by the President, the proposal was received by some as a defensible temporary measure, by others as a doubtful undertaking, and by others as a purely experimental venture. However, these camps have met the approval of the country and this Congress enacted legislation which makes them a permanent feature of our national life.

NEUTRALITY. For several years, Congress has wrestled with the problem of neutrality. The nation was ready for some policy that would bring assurance of no more wars for our people, except in the case of invasion. The neutrality act passed by the previous Congress seemed wholly unsatisfactory. Another effort was made by this Congress, so that today, we have a neutrality act which does not satisfy either the advocates of a mandatory policy or the advocates of a policy which places broad discretion in the hands of the President. However, it is the law and its application (if it should be applied) in the case of the present conflict between China and Japan in which war has not been formally declared by either party, will be interesting indeed. Suffice to say that when Congress resumes its labors in January next, there will be a demand for a recasting of the present neutrality act.

THE SOFT COAL INDUSTRY. On two previous occasions, Congress enacted legislation to stabilize the soft coal industry by setting up a Bituminous Coal Commission with broad powers. The earlier bills also provided for district boards, divided the whole country into districts and provided a tax whereby coal prices and trade practices could be stabilized. Each time, the previous legislative ventures in this field ran afoul of the Supreme Court. So the present Congress, modified the legislation to meet the Court's objections and thus created the Bituminous Coal Commission operating under the Guffey-Vinson Act.

FARM TENANCY. The Agricultural census of last year indicates that there are 2,800,000 tenant farmers in this country. It indicates also that farmers are slipping from ownership into tenancy at the rate of 40,000 per year. To be sure, these figures embrace farmers in the south where a few acres constitute a farm. In fact, the tenancy problem is far more acute below the Mason-Dixon line than in any other section of the land. In the hope of meeting the growing problem of farm tenancy, Congress enacted a three year program under which an effort will be made to provide farms for people with farm experience who may be approved by county committees in the rural counties of the nation. Ten million was appropriated to make a start on this program. In the first year, it would make it possible to provide a farm for one tenant farmer out of every 1100 tenant farmers in the land. It is a modest beginning and in a sense experimental because of the magnitude of the problem.

HOUSING. Anyone who has ever visited a large city and noted the slums and tenements where light and air are at a premium, where children play in the streets and where conditions are conducive to crime and disease will appreciate both the magnitude of the problem and the need for a remedy. In the last five years, government housing activities has been sporadic and by general consent rather fruitless. This Congress enacted the Wagner Housing Bill which provides for loans and grants to slum clearance housing in the hope of providing decent and sanitary places of abode for the people in the low income brackets. The bill also provides low-cost housing for all types of cities and represents the first frontal assault on the problem of providing low rent habitations for people with incomes so slender as to be forced into slum conditions.

THE COURTS. After the prolonged controversy over the proposal to enlarge the membership of the Supreme Court, Congress finally passed a sort of Court reorganization bill that applies only to those Federal Courts that are inferior to the Supreme Court. Among other things, the bill provides for the intervention of the Government through the Attorney General in cases where a question of constitutionality arises and also modifies the present power of Federal courts to issue injunctions so that an injunction petition must be presented to a 3-judge court before it becomes final.

PRICE MAINTENANCE. For years, the small independent merchant has had a difficult time to survive in the face of competition from group stores operated by corporations with almost unlimited capital. One of the difficulties was that group stores could sell trademarked and nationally advertised merchandise at a loss in order to attract customers and the independent merchant could scarcely meet this competition. Such items, when sold below cost were known as "loss leaders." The manufacturers and distributors of such merchandise could take refuge in the argument that they had no power under existing law to dictate the price at which a commodity should be sold. State legislatures thereupon approached the problem and 42 states enacted legislation making it lawful for manufacturers to set the re-sale price of goods. A question then arose as to whether contracts which established the re-sale price of a trademarked article was not in violation of the Anti-Trust laws, in the case of goods that were shipped in interstate commerce. Congress therefore enacted the Miller Tydings Price Maintenance Bill which puts the stamp of legality upon such contracts. This legislation is destined to play a most important part in the business life of the nation.

TAX LOOPHOLES. Treasury experts have estimated that as much as 75 million dollars in revenue is lost annually as a result of loopholes in the present tax laws whereby personal holding companies are set up, large incomes are credited to such holding companies and thereby escape a heavy tax rate. This device is legal under existing laws. To plug this loophole, Congress amended the existing revenue laws, more clearly defined holding companies and raised the rate of tax to levels that are almost confiscatory. This bill spells the doom of the so-called personal holding companies.

WAGE AND HOUR BILL. The Senate passed the Black Connery Bill to establish minimum wages and maximum hours on a basis of \$16 per week. The bill went to the Labor Committee of the House. Extensive hearings were held. The bill was amended very materially and reported to the House for action. Because of the peculiar nature of the rules of the House, only one method was available for immediate consideration of the bill and that was to obtain a special rule from the Rules Committee of the House. This Committee is composed of 14 members. There was enough opposition in the Rules Committee to block the granting of a rule and hence the bill failed to receive action by the House.

RELIEF. As noted above, an appropriation of 1500 million was provided for relief. A limitation on the amount that might be expended in any one month was written into the bill so that the amount provided would run for the entire fiscal year ending June 30, 1938. The Administrator of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration expected to shorten the relief rolls by 600,000 over the fiscal year.

PURE FOOD & DRUG ACT. Twice in previous Congresses, the Senate passed a Pure Food & Drug Act. Each time it failed of enactment because it was tied up in a House Committee. This year, the Senate passed a Pure Food & Drug Act in March. It went to the House Committee on Interstate & Foreign Commerce. There it languished and never was reported to the House for action. There is prospect of its enactment early next year.

RAILROAD RETIREMENT ACT. On two previous occasions, Congress enacted a Railroad Retirement Act, providing annuities for railroaders. The first act was in part invalidated by the Supreme Court. The second act was on the way to the Supreme Court when railroad men and railroad management sat down around a table and agreed upon a measure with the understanding that neither side would challenge its constitutionality. In that form, this Congress re-enacted this legislation and today it is being vigorously administered. It constitutes a sane and agreeable disposal of a controversial matter.

AGRICULTURE. This Congress enacted no general farm legislation. Several bills were pending which sought to establish the principle of crop control, crop loans and the ever-normal granary. However, differences of opinion arose in the House Committee on Agriculture with the result that no general farm bill was reported. There were a number of measures enacted which reduced the interest rate on farm loans from the Federal Land Banks, and which changed many provisions of the existing Federal Land Bank Act.

STATUS QUO. Bills introduced in this first session of the Congress retain their legislative status when Congress convenes in January. In other words, Congressional Labors will be resumed in January exactly where they were dropped on August 21st and it is expected that there will be immediate action on Wages & Hours, Neutrality, War Profits, Farm Legislation and other items. We'll be seeing you in January.

VETERANS. Most important measure enacted at this session of Congress was one bearing the support of all veterans organizations dealing with pensions for widows and orphans.

RAILROADS. For the second time, a bill to modify the so-called Long-short-haul-clause of the Interstate Commerce Act died in the Senate. A year ago, this measure in which railroads, railroad labor, shippers and others were interested passed the House and was pigeonholed in a Senate Committee. In this session it again passed the House early in the Spring but suffered the same pigeonhole fate in the Senate.

CIVIL SERVICE. Virtually every measure enacted in the present session which provided for additional governmental employees, came before the House with a patronage provision in it. Vigorous effort was made to amend such bills on the floor to require that all employees come under Civil Service. These amendments failed in every instance, despite the efforts of the Civil Service Committee to have them inserted in these measures and despite the insistence of the President that the merit system be extended upward, outward and downward.

CONSERVATION. A bill to earmark the revenues that derive from the excise taxes on sporting goods and ammunition and to devote those revenues together with most of the revenue from the sale of Duck Stamps to conservation purposes was enacted. Under the provisions of this act, the Federal government contributes 75% and the States 25% for the development of wildlife projects. Illinois would be entitled to approximately \$63,000 of the Federal funds each year for this purpose.

ANTI-LYNCHING BILL. After a stormy session some months ago, the House passed the Gavagan Anti-Lynching Bill. All this time it languished in the Senate and failed to come up for action. It therefore remains as unfinished business for the next session.

BANKRUPTCY AND REORGANIZATION. A monumental measure was passed to completely re-codify the bankruptcy act. Supplementary acts were passed dealing with fees in bankruptcy and reorganization cases.

UNEMPLOYMENT CENSUS. On occasion, Congress has been freely criticized for lavish relief and unemployment appropriations without definite knowledge of what the unemployment situation is. To that end, a score of bills were introduced to provide for an unemployment census. Most of these failed to meet the President's approval. A measure was finally enacted with certain permissive authority under which it is expected to take a census of the unemployed by means of self-registration on certain appointed days. The Post Office Department and the Dept. of Labor and Commerce will work out the details.

GOVERNMENT REORGANIZATION. For a long time studies have been under way by experts both in and out of government to simplify and streamline the whole structure of government. Recommendations made by committees of experts included two new Cabinet positions, the consolidation of relief and security operations under one head, the abolition of the office of Comptroller General and the substitution of an Auditor General together with additional executive assistants for the President. Only one portion of this program, namely the six assistants to the President was enacted by the present Congress.