

THE CONGRESSIONAL FRONT
By Congressman Everett M. Dirksen
16th (Ill) District

UNCLE SAM VS 48 STATES

As this is written, a fight is brewing in the House of Representatives. It will probably be decided before you read this. It will involve many issues. Some will be real and some will be manufactured out of unreality. It is a highly important controversy. And you should know the facts because they will be difficult to glean from countless pages of the Congressional Record.

HAT'S IT ALL ABOUT.

It's a fight over the question of whether the U.S. Employment Service offices shall remain in the hands of the Federal Government or whether they shall be returned to the States. It is important to everybody and involves among other things, a moral issue. For convenience, let's present the picture by time-periods, namely, Pre-war, during-the-war, and post-war.

PRE-WAR

Away back in 1933, Congress enacted a law known as the Wagner-Peyser Act. It provided for the creation of employment offices throughout the country. They were to be operated by the States with Federal assistance in the form of money. Two years later, Congress enacted the Social Security Act. Among other things, that act provided for the taxing of employers and the payment of compensation to persons who were out of work and could not find a job. To obtain such unemployed benefit payments, the person who was jobless had to register. He had to be referred to a suitable job if one was available. If no suitable job was available he could draw unemployment benefits. It was quite apparent that to make this system work, the function of finding a job for a jobless person or making jobless payments should be operated as a coordinated function. Accordingly, Congress wrote into the law that Federal funds would not be available to states unless the jobless benefits were paid thru the Employment Service offices. All this worked very well and then came the war.

THE WAR PERIOD.

During the war, our chief problem was to find manpower for industries working on defense contracts. The President thought it might be well to ask the States to loan these Employment Offices to the Federal Government to assist in getting the necessary manpower. Twelve days after Pearl Harbor, the President telegraphed the Governors asking them to turn these offices over to the U.S. The Governors did. These Employment Offices were then operated by the Social Security Board until September 1942 and were then transferred to the War Manpower Commission. When the war ended, the President then transferred these offices to the Labor Dept. That's where they are at this moment. It was recognized that this was a "loan" of these offices by the States, for, in the Appropriation Act of 1946 which provided the money to run these offices, Congress inserted an amendment which stated that "The Employment Services facilities, property and personnel 'loaned' by the States to the U.S. Employment Service, shall be returned to the States not later than three months after the termination of hostilities in the war with Japan as determined by Presidential proclamation or by a concurrent resolution of the Congress."

POST-WAR.

The war is over. Hostilities have ceased. But the President has not so proclaimed. And these offices are still under U.S. control. So what happens? A person is jobless. He registers with an Employment Office. It's run by Federal people. It's their business to find him a suitable job. Meanwhile, he also applies for unemployment benefits. This application is filed with the State people. If the Federal people don't find him a suitable job, the State people MUST pay him. They have no choice if he is otherwise eligible. The Federal people don't have to follow the state law which sets forth what a "suitable" job is. Thus, State funds can be dissipated by the action of persons who are on the Federal rolls. Now, both Congress and the President long ago recognized this fact and provided that finding the jobs if available and paying the benefits where a job was not available should be coordinated. And it is so stated in the Social Security Act. But now, the Federal Government does not want to return these offices to the States where they belong.

ACTION.

When the bill to increase unemployment benefits was before the Senate a few weeks ago, that body by a vote of 56 to 23 adopted an amendment offered by Senator Lucas of Illinois which ordered the return of these offices to the States in 90 days after enactment. That bill came to the House and was tabled in the Ways and Means Committee. It's still there and the Employment offices are still in Federal hands. A few days ago, the author of the Front offered an amendment to an appropriation bill to accomplish the same purpose. That amendment was adopted in the Committee by a vote of 23 to 12. That bill with the amendment is now before the House for a decision. There is a moral obligation as well as a logical and legal reason for turning these offices back to the States. Yet, this proposal has kicked up a fuss. Don't you wonder why?