

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

'Mussolini of the House' under attack

Speaker of the House Jim Wright (D-Tex.) is under heavy attack on a variety of fronts. Wright, characterized as the "Mussolini of the House" by Republican colleague Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), for his high-handed methods as Speaker, is being investigated for some of his wheeling-and-dealing on behalf of people who have bankrolled his campaigns.

In mid-May, a self-appointed citizens' lobby group, Common Cause, demanded an inquiry into Wright's earnings from his book, *Reflections of a Public Man*. Accusations have also been raised that the Speaker has used his political influence to attain special treatment from federal authorities for Texas savings and loans institutions which were in economic difficulties.

On May 26, seventy-two Republican congressmen held a press conference, at which they presented a formal request for an Ethics Committee investigation into Wright's financial dealings. On May 24, House Republicans had spent two hours on the floor documenting how a straightjacket has been placed on the House under Wright's tenure of office, turning it into a rubber stamp for measures worked out by the Democratic leadership. Among other things, there has been a "sharp increase" in restrictive rules, denial of minority rights, and various technical tricks to bypass the normal legislative process.

The House Republicans documented how committee hearings have declined by more than one-third since 1978, with more bills rammed directly onto the floor. Nearly half of the bills passed in the 100th Congress (now in session) were of a purely commemo-

rative nature, compared to only 9.5% of the bills in the 95th Congress a decade ago.

More frivolity and less substance, say House Republicans. Some 44% of the bills brought to the House floor in this Congress were under restrictive debate rules that limit amendments, compared to 12% a decade ago. As one Republican, Dick Cheney (R-Wyo.), put it, "It's a Speaker who will not let the House proceed unless he can dictate the outcome."

The problem is well-known on Capitol Hill, but is only now becoming a matter of public concern. As an indication of how widely recognized the problem is, one Senate aide, when told that the Supreme Soviet in Moscow had not yet ratified the INF treaty, said, "Well, it will probably be less problematic than in the U.S. Senate. It's more like a rubber stamp operation, like the House of Representatives."

Wright has characterized the Republican criticism as "carping" by people who "want to throw thumb-tacks on the playing field."

Banking chairman predicts depression

Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wis.), in a statement on the floor of the Senate on May 24, warned of a serious recession or even depression in 1989 or 1990. "Our businesses, our families, our farms are up to their eyeballs in debt," said Proxmire. "We are long overdue for a recession. That recession will be a killer. Here is why: With \$9 of business debt for every dollar of earnings, business failures and insolvencies will sweep through our country like a tidal

wave. As businesses close their doors in bankruptcy, tens of millions of Americans will lose their jobs. Savings are as low as family debt is high. So, with unemployment zooming, millions of families will collapse into bankruptcy.

"Ask Texas," continued Proxmire. "Texas today is America tomorrow."

Proxmire, who has been highly critical of the various gimmicks proposed to prevent a new stock market crash, is demanding massive austerity, "Obviously, what we need is to reduce borrowing. We should increase savings. That, of course, means we have to consume less. . . . It will be political torture."

But does the good senator believe that this will really prevent a depression? No, indeed! He realizes that it is doomed to failure. "In the short run, this will give us sure economic misery. Unemployment will increase. Income will fall. Profits will fall. . . . If we cut our spending, if we reduce borrowing, if we raise taxes, our economy will decline."

And what does the Banking Committee chairman conclude? "The next President and his party at that time will be in a political dilemma from which there will be no escape." To the extent that they see no alternative to the double-zero solution of Dukakis or Bush in this year's election, the citizens of this nation will face that same dilemma.

Senate approves ban on plastic firearms

The Senate on May 25, by voice vote, approved a bill banning the manufac-

ture, sale, or possession of plastic firearms and other weapons not detectable by security devices. The Senate action clears the way for a conference committee to work out a compromise with the House, which had passed a similar bill earlier this month.

The aim of both the House and Senate legislation is to bar firearms which are made of plastic or other substances that elude detection by security devices at airports and in many public buildings. The Senate legislation is also aimed at halting the production of toy guns so closely resembling real ones that they can be used in the commission of crimes.

The National Rifle Association, which originally opposed the bill, dropped its opposition in the face of overwhelming congressional support.

Will Senate override trade bill veto?

President Reagan vetoed the trade bill on May 24, only to have his veto overridden in the House by 308 to 113. In the Senate, however, it will not be such an easy match. The Senate, now fully occupied with the INF treaty, will not consider the trade bill until after Memorial Day. And it is highly uncertain whether there will be a sufficient number of supporters to rally the two-thirds majority needed to override the veto.

President Reagan asserted in his veto message that he is ready to sign a modified version of the trade bill. The main points the President said he objected to were the provision requiring employers with over 100 employees to notify their employees at least 60 days before the closing of a plant, and

new restrictions on the export and transportation of Alaskan oil.

There were other items found objectionable by the President, such as the provision to create a "Council on Competitiveness" and a requirement that the President negotiate a new international institution on debt forgiveness, as well as some other issues. But the President emphasized that if the plant-closing provision and the provision on the export of Alaskan oil were removed, he could pretty much sign the bill as it is. It is highly unlikely, however, that there will be any time to work out a new bill during this session of Congress.

It will be no great loss. Faced with a President who refuses to recognize that the economy is in a crisis, and a Congress that reacts to the economic crisis with a protectionist monstrosity similar to the Smoot-Hawley bill of 1930, barring unforeseen occurrences, the nation is faced with a choice between cholera and the plague.

Bipartisan group talks tough on Sandinistas

As Senate leaders proceed to ratify an INF agreement which will be violated a thousand times over before the ink on the resolution of ratification dries, congressional Contra supporters are demanding that the Sandinistas comply with cease-fire accords and take concrete steps to make democratic reforms. Some congressmen are threatening to push for a renewal of military aid to the Nicaraguan resistance. The lack of progress in ongoing peace talks has caused some irritation among congressional stalwarts.

Well, if you can't take care of the

big guys, like the Soviet Union, you can at least beat up on the little guys, like Nicaragua. If you can't trap an elephant, you can at least kill a bug—if only to prove your manhood.

Let us hope, that when the first cautious reports of Soviet INF violations start to filter in, some of our congressional stalwarts will raise their voices in protest, to add them to the few stalwarts like Helms, Humphrey, and Hollings, and a handful of others, who tried to block this infamous sell-out. One fears, however, that the lion-like bellowing at the antics of a Daniel Ortega by our congressional stalwarts, will become more like the mouse that roared, when the Muscovites are the offenders.

Moscow cheats as a matter of principle

Three Senate Judiciary Committee reports, one Department of Defense report, and seven other federal government reports have shown that, since 1917, the Soviets have committed over 200 international security treaty violations. In the words of Lenin, "Every peace program is a deception . . . unless its principal object is . . . the revolutionary struggle." If one wants to document them since 1920, one will find Soviet treaty violations with the Georgian Republic (1921), Great Britain (1921), Czechoslovakia (1945), Turkey (1945), Afghanistan (1946), Lithuania (1940), Finland (1939), Latvia (1940), Estonia (1940), Poland (1939), Romania (1940), China (1940), Poland (1943), and Yugoslavia (1943), just to mention a few. With a track record like that, who would stop running?