

# Censorship Heavier Than Prussian Muzzle

Senator Borah Characterizes the Espionage Bill—Senator Cummins, in Voicing His Opposition, Criticises President Wilson

It is a bad measure and will remain a bad measure in spite of such changes as we may be able to force into it before it is passed by the Congress. It is so bad that the modifications will not help it much."

Such was the comment of Senator William E. Borah of Idaho, in Washington the other day, when he was asked what he thought of the so-called Espionage bill of the Administration providing for press censorship and various other drastic wartime departures from American custom.

"The things they are allowed to say and write and publish in autocratic Prussia today will be prohibited in this democratic America by the terms of this very law," continued the Idaho Senator, "and we propose to enact it as one of the preliminaries to our entering this war to rid the world of Prussianism."

It was on the afternoon Mr. Balfour arrived in this country that Senator Albert B. Cummins of Iowa gave this interview at his home in Washington on the same subject, and he took the safe arrival of the British Foreign Minister at the capital of the United States as a text upon which to hang his comment on the effort to control the press of the country.

"This very arrival of Mr. Balfour in Washington this afternoon," said the Senator, "is only one of many illustrations—but a very striking illustration—of the fact that we need no drastic, no despotic law to hamper the newspapers of the United States in time of war or at any other time. The papers have known about the movements of the British Foreign Secretary and various facts as to the time of his arrival and route have been in the possession of the news gatherers, but those facts have not been printed because the editors have realized the very obvious danger there would be in such publication for Mr. Balfour and his associates. So, with no law whatever to control their actions, the papers, in this case, have been actuated solely by the dictates of patriotism and common decency, and this, in spite of the fact, as I take it, that the details of the Balfour journey constituted what is considered big news.

"I think we may safely depend upon the newspapers to behave in the same way throughout the war. We may rely upon their sense of responsibility for the country's welfare. And we should be very gradual about approaching any sort of censorship except that which the papers, acting together and in co-operation with the army and navy authorities, are willing to impose upon themselves as free institutions of a country the constitution of which guarantees their freedom.

"I attribute the efforts to curtail that freedom needlessly and unjustly, by the enactment of laws inspired by the Administration, and not originating in Congress at all, to two things: first, an exaggerated idea of the danger in so-called 'information of aid to the enemy' and, second, the desire of the President to take to himself more and more power and ever-increasing control of all the af-

fairs of the nation. Mark you, I have not a shred of sympathy for Germany, and she is doomed to defeat. I have no belief in her political or social or industrial system and, on the other hand, I shall support the President by voting for all the arms and money that he needs for the successful outcome of the war. But I think it would be a deplorable thing if the United States, which has gone into the war to fight for democracy, should emerge from it as practically the only autocracy left on the face of the earth. There is real danger of that.

movement to draw into the hands of the Executive all the power of the Government and the majority in Congress has subordinated its will to that of the President or some administrative department, not only in recent matters pertaining to the war, but in all things, and Mr. Wilson is carrying to extremes that I had never dreamed possible the tendencies of Roosevelt. Laws, instead of being definite and specific, now leave to the President and the departments a breadth of discretion that is appalling.

"Because of this tendency and because



Senator Albert B. Cummins.

The Espionage bill is a marked symptom of that danger.

"We already are a long way along the road toward being an autocracy and we have been traveling that road at accelerating speed ever since the beginning of the first Wilson Administration. It is difficult to understand, for the things that the President has done to increase the power of his office at the expense of the Congress are all inconsistent with the things that Wilson had said as a historian and writer on the laws of the country. But, since his first election, there has been a persistent

of the war itself it is now more important than ever before that we should preserve the confidence of the people in the Government. The vital thing is not to risk destroying that confidence for fear of letting Germany know something which she is bound to learn anyhow and which will probably do her no good whatever. It is more than ever necessary now that the people should believe that those at the head of the nation's affairs are not only wise but unselfish. Nothing instills suspicion in these matters so quickly as attempts at concealment. It is most desirable that the people should know every-

thing that is going on and who is responsible for everything.

"Of course, I do not mean by that that they should know such details as the movements of troops or ships and other military information which may be and will be properly suppressed at the source of information until the proper time comes to divulge it. Those are military secrets which the papers themselves may be relied upon to suppress, but the effort of the Administration, through the bill prepared in its Department of Justice, was to include many other things and to make it a crime even to ask about these things. That, of course, has been modified somewhat, but the bill in its present form is still bad. It is still an effort of the Administration to broaden its power for preserving secrecy to include all matters pertaining to national defense and welfare, and that means secrecy on such vital matters as the conservation and distribution of our food supply, our industrial activities and the raising of our armies.

"These things are all a part of our defense, but they are not matters to be hidden. They are, essentially, matters that demand publicity and they should receive it in the fullest measure from the press and from public discussion. Of course, Germany would like to know how we raise our troops and how we raise our crops, but it is much more important that our own people should know those things than that Germany should not know them.

"I had supposed that this struggle between publicity and secrecy which had been going on for centuries had been won for all time in this country at least by publicity. But it seems that we must keep on fighting for it, even to the extent of opposing the President in every dangerous autocratic tendency, but without putting the slightest obstacle in his way so far as winning this war is concerned.

"I almost hate to say for publication what I think about the ending of the war. It may sound too optimistic or even sensational, but I believe it will be over in six months and that the end will come in that time because of the collapse of the German Government. It is in its last phase now and, with the end of the Government, will come the end of the Hohenzollern dynasty itself. Germany will have some form of republican Government. So will all the nations of Europe. I believe that even such an unoffending monarch as George V. will have to abdicate. England herself, under the stress of the enormous expense of the war, will come to the conclusion that the time has arrived to relieve herself of the financial burden of supporting a merely ornamental monarch. And the change will come to Italy and Greece and all the rest. As I said a few minutes ago, the United States must guard against being the one autocracy in a world of democracies.

"Whether or no we are an autocracy and whether the war ends in the near or remote future the United States is now committed to a participation in foreign affairs both during the war and for all time afterward that is entirely new to

us. This would still be true if the war were to end tomorrow without our aid or participation. In his speech to the Senate, a speech which will be always memorable, the President spoke of a world peace. We are committed to doing our share in the future toward preserving such a peace and that means a lasting obligation to take a part in European affairs, whenever necessary, which hitherto has never been expected of us by others or even dreamed of by ourselves.

"That is another and most vital reason why we should preserve the liberties of the people and their newspapers, liberties that are so directly attacked by this espionage bill. It attacks them at various points. It is a bill of twelve chapters which have nothing to do with each other. Only one of these chapters applies to a censorship. Some of them are limited to operation in a time of war, but most of them are intended to give more control to the executive department in both peace and war.

"One chapter which makes a tremendous grant of added power to the

President which Congress should retain for itself would give him the right to lay an embargo. Another chapter would revive the danger of search and seizure which the nation thought it had guarded against by the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution, and another chapter adds to the already autocratic powers of the Postmaster General."

It is just possible that the proposed law for censorship control of the American press belongs in the list of things we are doing in this country merely in imitation of the other countries, both our allies and our enemy, without first stopping to inquire whether or not a thing is worth imitating. It is a part of the inevitable hysteria incidental to going into any war.

But this war is now nearly three years along for all the belligerents except ourselves, and there is opportunity to be more or less discriminating in our imitation. There is no need of copying what the European countries did with the press at the outset of the war, for they

have all admitted the blunder of it since

remedy the early defects.

England herself was the chief offender against common sense in the suppression of news at the outset of the war by operating through a censorship bureau that knew nothing about news, and very little about military affairs. Lord Roberts, himself, on the eve of his departure for France, was one of the critics of the British system. He said that it was most unfortunate and entirely needless from a military point of view that the English people should be kept in such complete ignorance of the progress of the war and of the failures and successes of her own armies.

Sydney Brooks attributed the failure of one of the British loans early in the war to win subscribers in Chicago to the British censorship, which had prevented the American newspaper public from being properly informed as to the needs and activities of England.

Another misfortune which everybody agrees was due very largely to the British censorship was the difficulty in get-

ting recruits. Resentment over the Zeppelin raids on the English coast towns caused more eagerness to enlist than the home papers could arouse because of the handicap put upon them in printing the news that the people wanted.

And, to cite one more of several mistakes that may be justly linked up with the unreasonable censorship, the bungling of the Dardanelles campaign is charged, in part, at least, against the inability of the people and their representatives to protest in time because of their ignorance of the whole matter.

Austria began the war with a censorship bureau of something over two hundred inexperienced officials and army men who knew nothing about the press and charged with the duty of suppressing the news. They were much more drastic than the censors were in Russia. Well, perhaps they were right from the point of view of the throne, for Russia has become a democracy. But the United States is a democracy, too. It might better copy Russia in the matter than Prussia, or even England's early methods.