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—THE TRIBUNE CREDO

WILL SENATE FIGHT?

The state department has shown its contempt for the prerogatives of the Senate and its indifference to security risks within its own ranks by dismissing its chief security evaluations officer. It did so in the face of a direct warning carried by a member of the Senate internal security subcommittee to Secretary of State Rusk.

The victim of the purge, Otto F. Otepka, is a veteran of 27 years of government service. For the last 10 he has been the man who gives security clearances to state department employees. So well and efficiently did he perform that in 1958 he was awarded the state department's meritorious service award.

But, as Sen. Dodd of Connecticut has said, in the topsy-turvy world of the state department, the idea is to catch the cop and not the culprit. So charges were brought against Otepka for having engaged in conduct unbecoming a diplomatic officer—namely, in collaborating with the Senate security subcommittee. He was accused of having disclosed secret department documents to senators.

In the department it was said that Otepka "is out of step with the times." A spokesman remarked, "We are not witch hunting any more. We have no security risks, and he knows it." The Senate subcommittee's reaction is one of skepticism. Its investigation of department wirepulling to picture Castro as the "liberator" of Cuba and not as a Communist hardly persuaded it that there's nothing kinky in the department.

It has since been trying to evaluate the security practices, or lack of them, in the department. It was hampered by a department order, issued under the cloak of "executive privilege," directing that state department officials remain away from the subcommittee and give it no information. Otepka freely cooperated with the subcommittee.

Chairman Eastland of the subcommittee commented, "The powers of Congress are at stake, and I intend to protect Mr. Otepka by every means at my command against accusations which complain, in effect, that he told the truth when asked to do so by a Senate subcommittee."

There can be no doubt that this case reflects an intention by the Kennedy administration to conduct a purge of patriots. The subcommittee feels that the often misused doctrine of executive privilege can be claimed only by the President, not by any bureaucrat who feels like thwarting Congress. We trust that the Senate will press this central point, for if it lets the issue go by default, Congress will soon find itself hamstrung by the bureaucracy in looking into any facet of public business whatsoever. It would be salutary if it invoked its powers to punish for contempt.

Meanwhile, it should exert its utmost efforts to safeguard Mr. Otepka's career thru avenues of appeal which ultimately permit reviews of his case by Secretary Rusk and President Kennedy. We have no great faith that there will be sympathy for Mr. Otepka in any of these quarters, for it is obvious the administration was out to get him, and did. These are the kind of rewards a loyal American can expect from a crowd which can always find excuses for Khrushchev or Tito, but none for a vigorous anti-Communist.