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Allen-Scott Report

State Tries A Fast One

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An amazing piece of legislation is being seriously considered by a House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee, headed by Representative Wayne Hays, D-O.

Unknown to the public at large—as well as most members of Congress — this measure has all the earmarks of being the biggest “sleeper” of President Johnson’s wide-ranging legislative program.

On the ground of establishing “one personnel system for the Department of State and to improve the morale of its employees,” this extraordinary bill would:

—Create a new super foreign service by blanketing in thousands of civil service employes of the State Department, and thousands of other civil service employes on foreign duty of 22 other government agencies —among them the Peace Corps, U.S. Information Agency, Agency for International Development (in charge of foreign aid), Export-Import Bank, Federal Aviation Agency, Maritime Commission.

—Strip these civil service employes of their veterans’ preference, job security and other safeguards under existing laws. Under this measure, they could be arbitrarily fired within days on the charge of being incompetent, inadequate or otherwise undesirable.

—Make the Deputy Undersecretary of State for Administration—now William J. Crockett, principal author of the sweeping bill—virtual czar over the new super foreign service, with power to hire, fire, promote, transfer, and to bar these employes from aiding congressional investigations of their agencies.

Unpublished charts prepared by Crockett—which some members of the Foreign Affairs Committee haven’t even seen —illustrating the scope and range of the far-reaching legislation label the proposed new super foreign service as “The (State) Department and Domestic Field Establishment” and the “Overseas Field Establishment.”

In the past State Department authorities have emphatically denied the existence of an establishment in the department.

No. 1 target of this little-known bill is Otto Otepka, State Department security officer whom Crockett has long been trying to oust for allegedly giving information to a staff member of a congressional committee.

The measure would strip Otepka, and all other affected civil service employes, of their present right to discuss their cases with members of Congress under the provision: “The right of persons employed in the civil service, either individually or collectively, to petition Congress, or any member thereof, or to furnish information to either House of Congress, or to any committee or member thereof, shall not be denied or interfered with.”

Foreign Affairs committee men have been informed that at a high-level State Department conference, Crockett remarked, “Once this bill is passed, there will never again be an Otto Otepka in the department.”

This secret axing authority is stressed in a memorandum in the hands of the subcommittee. It points out that the legislation, sponsored by Representa-

tive Hays and strongly backed by the White House, would:

“Make it absolutely impossible for Congress or its duly constituted committees to make any sort of independent inquiry into the personnel, administrative or other actions of the department. Thousands of skilled, knowledgeable, dedicated public servants would be effectively sealed off from Congressional inquiry and contact, and all Congress could hope to obtain in the future would be carefully screened and audited reports and statements from the very individuals directly responsible for the department’s policies and actions.

“The bill virtually guarantees that the Department of State will speak with one voice and, as a result, Congress will be dealing with a duly constituted ‘mouthpiece.’”

Principal hatcheting provisions of the measure are Sections 22 and 25.

The former empowers the President to transfer to the new super foreign service, within three years, all civil service personnel of the State Department, and the 22 other government agencies. Those who balk are subject to immediate dismissal.

Section 25 divests them of existing veterans’ preference, job security and other safeguards. Once part of the proposed new foreign service, they would lose all these rights and privileges.

The American Legion is vigorously on record against the legislation. The government employes’ union irately charges it was not consulted.