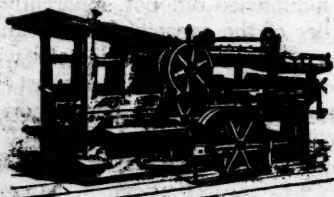




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Perspective

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Smith of Virginia

by Raymond Moley



IF THIS observer were to name the Most Valuable Member in this and several preceding Congresses, he would be hard put to choose between two gentlemen from Virginia, the indispensable Byrd and the man affectionately known as "Judge" Smith. Howard Worth Smith resigned a judgeship to run for Congress 28 years ago and has served continuously since. Even beyond the potent Speaker, he is the man to be reckoned with by any member or interest with an ax to grind. Officially, his present power is as chairman of that exalted court of first instance, the Committee on Rules. Bills do not reach the floor without a "rule" from that body unless the House, on a rare occasion, votes otherwise. Under the Smith scrutiny the worth of a bill is measured, the sly "gimmicks" are exposed, and the sponsor is required to show good cause.

But Smith's official authority is overshadowed by the respect with which scores of his colleagues, inexperienced or busy or careless, regard the "Judge's" opinion. It may be assumed that on every measure that comes before the House many, many Smith-influenced votes can be counted. And no member would question the Virginian's devotion to principle, his deep understanding of constitutional verities, and his untiring persistence in behalf of the values embedded in his philosophy.

It is not inappropriate that he represents a district which was the homeland of Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Marshall.

STATESMAN'S RECORD

It can hardly be denied that no member can rival Smith in the number of constructive measures which he has sponsored and which have become the law of the land. There are those who introduced many times the number of proposals. But the score of a statesman is not the number of times at bat, but the number of hits and of runs batted in.

In 1939 he sponsored and succeeded in passing the famous Smith Act, which is the basic Federal law on sedition. The Supreme Court in some of its recent decisions presumed to read into the act its own version of "intent." Smith certainly knew more

about his "intent" than did the Supreme Court and he countered this year with H.R. 3. This bill would protect the jurisdiction of the states, not only in the field of subversion but in all other subjects, against the doctrine of Federal "pre-emption." In 1939 Smith called for and secured an investigation of the National Labor Relations Act and, as head of the inquiry, not only secured a reorganization of that board but wrote into the law amendments which became the basic structure of the Taft-Hartley Act. During the war he was co-sponsor of the famous Smith-Connally Act to protect war industry against strikes and other obstructions.

CONSISTENT EFFORTS

The spending record of this Congress has been bad enough, heaven knows. But the national debt might well have zoomed through the \$300 billion line except for Smith, working in the Rules Committee and on the floor. More than once when his committee granted a "rule" and a bill came before the House, he stood up and implored the House to send it back to its committee of origin. In one such effort alone, against a conglomerate local "improvements" bill, he was sustained by a vote of the House and thus saved the taxpayers two or more billions.

His voice was successfully raised against the pernicious practice of authorizing agencies to borrow with no measurable limit from the Treasury and thus avoid the constitutional process of appropriation.

His every legislative effort is in line with his philosophy of government. He sees a twofold threat to free institutions. The first is the building of a vast centralized government, with its inevitable bureaucracy. The second is the malignant narcotic of subsidies of all kinds. For, as Smith has well said, "the hand that passes out grants becomes, in the natural course of events, the mailed fist of dictatorship." There is a wealth of human history to justify that conclusion.

The real reactionary is the politician who would ignore that conclusion. True liberalism, embodied in a man like Smith, is a warning to us before it is too late.