

# Just a Quiet Little Hearing

To civil libertarians, the House Un-American Activities Committee has long been viewed as a reactionary aberration within the national government.

To many Americans of a Conservative or Rightist point of view, the committee has been viewed as a citadel against Communism in the United States.

Last week the committee conducted raucous hearings into the New Left that did little to disturb either sentiment.

The committee began its inquiry last Tuesday ostensibly to gather information for legislation making it a felony for an American citizen to aid "persons engaged in hostilities against the United States"—in this case the Vietcong. Nearly all its witnesses were militantly leftist members of assorted radical student organizations.

By the time the hearings ended Friday, some 50 persons, including one lawyer, had been arrested on disorderly conduct charges, the hearings themselves had consisted mainly of shouting, name-calling and pulpitering by both sides, and the stage had been set for a possible new test of the powers of the legislative and judicial branches of government.

From its outset, both the committee and the witnesses seemed to view the inquiry as a kind of struggle between good and evil, and some observers felt that the Congressmen welcomed the limelight, while the New Left welcomed both the forum and the martyrdom the hearings offered.

Typical of the tone of much of the hearings were the statement by Committee Chairman Edwin E. Willis, Democrat of Louisiana, that people who aided the Vietcong were "yellow-bellied cowards," and the reply from Steven Cherkoss of Berkeley, Calif., that the committee members themselves were "coward yellow-belly racists." Mr. Cherkoss, who said he was a West Coast organizer for the Progressive Labor Party, a Peking-oriented leftist group, said at another point, "We are Communists and we are proud of it." The admission about Communism—also made by some other witnesses—was a new twist in the committee hearings; at previous hearings, most witnesses had declined to answer when questioned.

One witness, 22-year-old Steven C. Hamilton, also a member of the Progressive Labor Movement at Berkeley, said, "I am proud to say that I and others collected money for the victims of the United States Government in National Liberation Front (Vietcong) areas."

At the conclusion of the hearings, Representative Joe R. Pool, Democrat of Texas, who had been acting chairman, announced that the committee had gathered all the information it needed to show that "revolutionary, hard-core Com-

munists" in America were helping the Vietcong. Actually, the hearings turned up little that had not been reported in newspapers earlier, but committee members nevertheless said the hearings would serve as the basis for legislation, and they confidently predicted enactment.

Other Congressmen weren't so sure. They felt it was unlikely the House would approve any bill related to the hearings, and some Congressmen renewed suggestions that the time had come to put some restraint on the Un-American Activities Committee.

As for the test of strength between Congress and courts, it began the day before the hearings opened when U. S. District Judge Howard F. Corcoran, granting a request by the American Civil Liberties Union, enjoined the committee from holding the hearings on grounds that they would have a "chilling effect" on free speech. But on a motion by the Justice Department, a three-judge Federal Court of Appeals set aside Judge Corcoran's order minutes before the hearings began.

A new three-judge panel—including Judge Corcoran—has been named to resolve the constitutional question involved.

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