

This Week in Washington

by RALPH E. CHURCH, Rep. 10th Congressional District. Washington, D.C., June 29—After a hectic week of confusion and maneuvering the President finally decided to follow the usual democratic procedure in looking to the enactment of his next tax program. It was originally (June 25th) proposed to attach the tax schedules carrying out the President's new proposals to the resolution extending the nuisance taxes expiring on June 30th, which resolution had already passed the House. This would have meant that in less than a week the Congress would pass legislation putting into effect a controversial tax program concerning which the majority of the membership of Congress knew virtually nothing. It would have meant that those affected by the program would not have the opportunity to present their views at committee hearings.

This proposed procedure of enacting new tax legislation in a period of five days represented a complete departure from democracy. To my mind it represented, purely and simply, an attempt at outright dictatorship on the part of the President. But when it became evident to him that public opinion was resentful of such dictatorial procedure and that the newspapers, even those friendly to the administration, became extremely critical, the President decided to adopt the procedure of allowing the Congress to at least study the program. He even went so far as to deny having made the extraordinary "rush" proposal.

When Roosevelt sent his message to Congress, without previous notice, on June 19th with reference to a new tax program, both the chairman of the Senate Committee on Finance and the Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, which would have charge of such legislation, state that the program would require extensive study and

would probably be considered at the next session. Senator Pat Harrison, chairman of the Committee on Finance, stated that the bill embodying the program should originate in the House and be considered on its merits. There was considerable controversy as to whether the new taxes should be considered at this session of Congress, but all seemed to agree that the program should receive extensive study.

On Monday, the 24th, the administration leaders in the House and Senate conferred with the President. Senator Joseph T. Robinson, Democratic floor leader, subsequently announced that an effort would be made to attach the tax schedule to the nuisance tax resolution which had to be passed by Saturday to prevent expiration. Senator Pat Harrison, chairman of the Committee on Finance, called tax experts to the committee room and began night until morning work. As a Democratic rebellion loomed Senator Robinson, Harrison, and Vice-President Garner urged the committee to support and uphold the President in rushing the full tax plan through by Saturday. Senator Harrison stated that "He (the President) is very anxious to have them placed on the joint resolution as amendments."

There then developed a broad national criticism of the proposal in

the press. Public opinion showed indications of being rebellious to such undemocratic and ill-considered procedure. Then came the denial of the President that he had asked for such action, much to the surprise of as well as doubtless personal embarrassment to Senators Robinson and Harrison, who had previously urged such action, much to the surprise of the President. What and whom is one to believe? Frankly, I believe that the people of the United States this week had evidence of dictatorial action on the part of the White House and when sharply rebuffed by public opinion, the President sought to save the situation by giving way to orderly legislative procedure and by denying he contemplated anything extraordinary.

This matter should not be passed over slightly. There is involved a question of taxation and a question of democracy in government. The power to tax is the power to de-

stroy. History recounts many wars and battles over the question of taxation. It was, in fact, over this question that we declared our independence from England. When this Republic was founded, the framers of the constitution took pains to protect the people in the matter of taxation by providing in the constitution that all revenue bills must originate in the House of Representatives. They desired to have the taxing power reside close to the people. A member of congress represents a relatively small unit of people and he is subject to re-election every two years, whereas a senator represents a whole state and serves for a term of six years. According to the Constitution, no Senator can introduce a tax bill.

In this last week we encountered an attempt to disregard all this and the orderly procedure of government. It is, of course, perfectly legitimate for a tax bill which has originated in the House to be amended in the Senate, but there is no

necessity for a new program, entirely unfamiliar to the people's representatives to be rushed through in five days. Regardless of its nature, the people who would be affected have a right to be heard and any tax program to be effective requires careful and tedious study. Otherwise there would most likely be legal opportunities for tax evasions, as well as possible destructive results on the whole economic life of the nation.

It having been decided to pursue the regular course, it is a fair presumption that Congress will be in session all summer. It is expected that the House Ways and Means Committee will begin its hearings on July 8th.

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