
"Splendid Job"

Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, his coat draped over a greying sling, arose on the floor of the U.S. Senate last week to hasten the moment of decision. On the previous day in the living room of his home, Joe had disclosed his intention to his lawyer. He saw censure as inevitable, and was eager to get it over with. Therefore, he said, he would move to limit debate on his censure.

To the Senate, McCarthy said that he had never meant to offend anyone. "I admit," said he, "that at times I have been extremely blunt in expressing my opinions. I do not claim to be a master of words." But, lest anyone think he was really apologizing, he added: "In the facts and opinions that I held, I am unchanged." Then he made his motion to cut off debate after two more days. After hours of wrangling, the Senate agreed.

An eloquent argument for censure came from Connecticut's Republican Senator Prescott Bush. McCarthy, said Bush, has "caused dangerous divisions among the American people because of his attitude and the attitude he has encouraged among his followers: that there can be no honest differences of opinion with him. Either you must follow Senator McCarthy blindly, not daring to express any doubts or disagreements about any of his actions, or, in his eyes, you must be a Communist, a Communist sympathizer, or a fool who has been duped by the Communist line." Bush defended Censure Committee Chairman Arthur Watkins from the abuse suffered at Joe's hands. Said he: "Mr. President, if I have ever met a brave and noble Senator, Arthur Watkins is that man. And, Mr. President, I for one will not walk off and leave him standing in this chamber with a coward tag on him—not without protest."

Noel, Noel. A while later, Illinois' Republican Senator Everett Dirksen launched into a seasonal mercy speech. "I had a moment to spend downtown the other day," he said. "I could hear the Gramophones and radios pealing out the lovely words and phrases which somehow give animation to people in this one season and that somehow soften the spirit—Hark! the Herald Angels Sing and O, Little Town of Bethlehem."

The members of the Senate, suggested Dirksen, should soften their spirits toward Joe McCarthy.

Shortly after Dirksen finished came one of the strangest performances of last or any other week. Republican Leader William Knowland announced that he had decided not to support the Watkins committee in its recommendation of censure. His argument: McCarthy's offenses had been committed before McCarthy's re-election in 1952.

It was Knowland himself who last Aug 2 made the motion to establish a committee to consider charges against McCarthy. He was not a lawyer, he said then, and he was unwilling to vote on censure until an able, honest committee of lawyers had made recommendations.

It was Knowland who selected the Republican members of the Watkins committee—much against their will. On Aug. 5 he told the Senate that he so trusted the committee members that he would be willing to stand trial for his life before them.

The members of the committee, drafted by Leader Knowland, started their task with the implicit understanding that Knowland would stand behind them and would help protect them against the inevitable attacks from McCarthy.

Said a Republican member of the Select Committee after Knowland announced his decision: "He ran out on us."

"Mene, Mene, Tekel . . ." But Knowland's move came as no surprise to at least one Senator: Democratic Leader Lyndon Johnson. No sooner had Knowland sat down than Johnson pulled from his desk drawer a prepared reply. The words McCarthy had used in describing the Watkins committee, said Johnson, would be "much more fittingly inscribed on the wall of a men's room." Bill Knowland flushed red and scowled furiously.

After that, there was little to do but start voting. The first roll call came on a Dirksen-authored substitute resolution that would have completely cleared Joe of any wrongdoing. It was on this motion that the McCarthyites based their fondest hopes; Dirksen had talked confidently of 30 or 35 favorable votes. While the clerk called the roll, South Dakota's Republican Senator Karl Mundt pranced up and down like a cheerleader, but to no avail. The resolution was defeated, 66 to 21, and the handwriting was on the wall.

Other votes followed. Substitutes introduced by McCarthy supporters were beaten down. But the Senate did drop the censure count against McCarthy for his abuse of Brigadier General Ralph Zwicker. In its place went a condemnation section against Joe for his "Communist handmaiden" and "lynch bee" sneers. At last came the final vote, on which Democrats voted solidly for censure and Republicans split evenly (see box).
More than two-thirds of the U.S. Senate had, therefore, condemned McCarthy for 1) contempt of the Hennings-Hayden-Hendrickson subcommittee that investigated him in 1951-52, and 2) his conduct toward the Senate and the Watkins committee since censure was recommended. Over and above these specific counts, McCarthy's colleagues censured him for bringing the Senate into dishonor and disrepute and for obstructing its legislative processes.

Condemnation. After the tally was announced. New Hampshire's foxy Republican Senator Styles Bridges arose to ask if the word "censure" actually appeared in the resolution. Vice President Nixon said that it did not. Some McCarthyites were jubilant: they claimed Joe had escaped censure. Some liberals were equally happy; they had said all along that the Senate would never dare "censure" Joe. McCarthy himself scorned this piece of nitpicking. Asked by a newsman if he thought he had been censured, Joe said: "I wouldn't say it was a vote of confidence." And Idaho's Republican Senator Herman Welker, a foursquare McCarthyite, had remarked, hours before the last vote was taken: "You don't censure a man to death. You condemn him to death." Senator Watkins pointed out that the historic verb in Senate censure resolutions is "condemn."

At week's end came the first word from the White House since the censure debate began. Dwight Eisenhower personally congratulated weary, browbeaten Arthur Watkins for a "very splendid job."

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