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The Congressional Front.  
(by Congressman Everett M. Dirksen)

At the present time, so much interest attaches to what is happening at the National Capitol at Washington, that an occasional news letter, containing instructive information, gossip, interesting personalities, and reminiscences might prove of genuine interest to everybody and in proportion as time permits, I shall be very happy, with the indulgence and good grace of the editor, to write such a letter.

I call this column the Congressional Front. And so it really is. But we cannot very well paraphrase the old saying "All Quiet On The Western Front." Things are anything but quiet here.

The echoes of President Roosevelt's inaugural address on Saturday, March 4th, delivered to 150,000 people in the Plaza in the rear of the National Capitol had scarcely died away until he summoned Congress to appear in special session on Thursday, March 9th to deal with the distress and economic stagnation in the nation.

Before the House can deal with legislation it must be organized. Accordingly, the Democratic Party held their caucus and selected Henry T. Rainey of Illinois for Speaker. Mr. Rainey lives in Carroltown and represents the 20th District, consisting of Brown Calhoun Cass Greene Jersey Mason Menard Morgan Pike and Scott Counties. Mr. Rainey was elected to Congress in 1903 and with the exception of one term has been here ever since. He is a scholarly appearing gentleman with a mass of white hair, wears a flowing bow tie, has a friendly pleasing countenance and graces the Speaker's Chair with distinction.

The Speaker has often been referred to as the second most powerful political individual in the nation. This probably springs from the fact that revenue and appropriation bills, dealing with the expending of the people's money can originate only in the House and the Speaker by virtue of his authority over the members and over the proceedings can thwart or bring about the enactment of bills dealing with the expenditure of public money.

Each party has it's leader. The Minority leader, that is the Republican leader is Mr. Bertrand Snell of New York who has been in Congress for 18 years. He is seldom if ever absent from a single session. His duty is to keep Republican members advised of proceedings and to give direction to the efforts of the Minority party both for and against any proposed legislation. He served as Chairman of the Republican National Convention in Chicago. Mr. Snell is a polished, capable, yet very democratic gentleman, esteemed by Democrats and Republicans alike for his fairness and cooperative spirit.

The Majority Floor Leader, Mr. Joseph W. Byrns comes from Nashville, Tennessee. He is a tall, lanky Democrat with a high pitched voice who has served in Congress for 24 years. He was a candidate for speaker but gave way to Mr. Rainey and accepted the Floor Leadership. He has a keen mind and can when occasion requires, get the House out of a parliamentary snarl.

Altogether, the 73rd Congress contains some interesting personalities. There is, for instance, Will Rogers of Oklahoma, no kin to the celebrated humorist, who in a short speech informed the House that he was a small-town saloon keeper all his life and was therefore opposed to the Beer Bill.

From Minnesota comes a Member named Shoemaker, who in his Congressional biography stated, "from the penitentiary to Congress. Others often go from Congress to the penitentiary." His right to have the oath administered was challenged and after much debate, he was seated. Congressman Shoemaker is a newspaper editor. A few years ago, he learned that a crooked banker had attempted to pay what was due on a certain trust fund to a widow and her children, in spurious bonds and at once began a crusade in behalf of this family with the result that the banker was compelled to pay the family in proper money with 6% interest for the time he withheld it. The banker, in a letter, upbraided Shoemaker whereupon, he sent the banker a letter, and on the envelope below the banker's name wrote, "Robber Of Widows And Orphans". This constitutes defamation under the Postal laws and on indictment and conviction Shoemaker was sentenced to Leavenworth for one year and one day. After his discharge from penitentiary, he immediately became a candidate for Congress and was elected. Under Minnesota law, anyone convicted of a felony has no civil rights unless they are restored by the legislature. Consequently, his right to a seat in Congress was challenged. But he was seated.

The House constitutes an assortment of personalities, old and young, rich and poor, representing every field of human endeavor. One thing they have in common: With few exceptions all devote themselves earnestly to the work. Offhand I should say that fully one half the members return to their offices four and five nights in the week and work until a late hour, keeping abreast of the volume of mail and the inundation of bills to be considered.

Thus far, there has not been a single indication of party politics. Democrats and Republicans alike are responsive to the immediate need for action in order to bring about prosperity. There are 117 Republicans, 5 Farmer Laborites, and 312 Democrats in the House. On the Emergency Banking Bill the vote was unanimous in favor of the Bill. On the Economy Bill 200 Democrats and 66 Republicans voted in favor and 82 Democrats, 41 Republicans and 5 Farmer Laborites voted against it. The bill legalizing beer carried by a vote of 316 to 97. Of those who opposed beer, about an equal number were Democrats and Republicans. Wherever there is opposition to a bill, it springs not from political considerations but from conviction concerning the provisions of such a bill.

By the time, this column reaches print, the House will have considered the Emergency Agricultural Relief Bill. It is one of the most far reaching and drastic grants of power to the President and Secretary of Agriculture that can be imagined. There is every indication that it will pass the House. If successful in its operation, it will mark President Roosevelt as one of the most heroic Presidents who ever occupied the White House.

Next Week I shall explain how bills are introduced and what the course of a bill is from its introduction to its enactment into law. Along with this I shall review the provisions in the legislation that has already been passed by the 73rd Congress.