Congress No Nero Fiddling Around

As part of a concerted effort to distract public attention from the most devastating political scandal in our nation's history, the White House has tried to paint the Congress in the role of Emperor Nero—fiddling with impeachment while the nation's problems burn on. It's a bum rap.

While the House Judiciary Committee—one out of 38 committees in the Congress—continues its impeachment investigation, the rest of Congress is proceeding in many legislative areas. A mid-year status report on labor's legislative priorities bears this out:

► *Tax Reform*—As the Memo went to press, pending before the House was a bill to phase out the oil depletion allowance with a labor-supported amendment to be offered wiping out immediately this corporate loophole. In the meantime both House and Senate hearings continue on tax reform, while one Senate tax cut proposal was stalled by filibuster.

► *Economic Controls*—Despite administration support for the maintenance of a standby wage-price control mechanism, the House Banking Committee and later the full Senate ended presidential authority to continue its mismanagement of the economy.

► *Trade*—The Burke-Hartke bill faces an uphill fight in ongoing Senate Finance Committee hearings. Meanwhile the rebounding Russian wheat deal spurred House-passed legislation to regulate commodity trading practices in the U.S. agricultural "stock market."

► *Health*—Long-awaited House hearings are underway on National Health Insurance, but final action is not expected until early next year when there is expected to be increased support for the labor-backed Griffiths-Corman bill. Meanwhile, the House Commerce and Senate Labor Committees continue deliberation on extending such federal health efforts as the Hill-Burton Hospital Construction program, the Community Mental Health Centers Act and 10 other labor-supported medical research, manpower and construction programs.

► *Education*—In May, the House and Senate both passed bills providing over $13 billion over a five-year span in federal aid to the nation's elementary and secondary school systems.

► *Labor Legislation*—Congress in 1974 resurrected and passed, and the President signed, a minimum wage bill similar to that vetoed last year which increased the minimum wage rate on June 1 to $2 with two more increases to follow. By early July House and Senate conferees should complete action on both a labor-endorsed pension plan reform bill as well as legislation extending the protections of the National Labor Relations Act to employes of non-profit hospitals. In other action, the House rejected a metric conversion bill which would have cost American workers millions in re-tooling and retraining costs, while the Senate rejected a proposal to deny food stamps to the families of workers on strike. And recently, hearings began on federal standards for state workmen's compensation.

► *Consumer Affairs*—The Senate passed the Hart-Magnuson No-Fault Auto Insurance reform bill and in early July will take up legislation passed by the House in April to establish a federal consumer protection agency.

► *Campaign reforms*—Although there is little hope for the labor-backed proposal for government financing of all federal election campaigns, the Senate in April passed a tough financing reform bill. While protecting the rights of unions to continue their voter education and registration activities along with raising voluntary political funds, the bill provides for strict limits on campaign contributions. Final House action is expected by mid-July. In a setback, the House rejected a national postcard registration bill designed to ease voter registration procedures for federal elections.

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