

# Washington Digest

National Topics Interpreted  
by William Bruckart  
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### Strange Bedfellows

Washington.—It has always been said that politics makes strange bedfellows. History has shown this statement to be true because in every political battle one can note unusual combinations, odd types working together, personal enemies fighting side by side—in truth, bedfellows for the time being.

Never has the truth of this old adage been better demonstrated, however, than in the current political fight that was precipitated by President Roosevelt's demand that congress pass a law which will allow the Chief Executive to add six new members to the Supreme court of the United States. The real congressional fight on the President's bold move has not yet gained full headway. But time enough has elapsed since Mr. Roosevelt offered his history-making demand for power to add enough judges to the Supreme court, judges of his own selection, to give him a majority, that those close to the congressional scene are now in a position to predict probably the most heated controversy since the days immediately preceding the Civil war.

Already, it can be stated, one can see senators and representatives who are known for their liberal views standing side by side with hard-boiled conservatives in opposition to the President's plan, which they describe as a move "to pack the Supreme court." Likewise one can see conservative Democrats from the old South following President Roosevelt and joining hands secretly with the wildest radicals in the senate. One will see Democrats and conservative Republicans in earnest conversation planning ways and means to halt the President's drive for control of the court and at the same time one can see radical Republicans planning with Democrats in support of the program—strange bedfellows, every one.

While this condition is interesting, it is by far less striking as I watch the proceedings than the extreme bitterness that is now developing. While, as I said, the controversy is hardly under way, there is even now personal animosity evident in the senate to a degree that I never have seen before. I had the privilege of observing the famous League of Nations fight at close range. There was personal bitterness in that senate battle. Old friendships were crushed and close relationships torn asunder. Yet, I think that the current controversy is likely to cause the League of Nations bitterness to pale into insignificance. In other words, there lies ahead for the congress a raging fire that is bound to destroy political lives and political ambitions. Which lives and which ambitions depend, I think, upon the answer which the country's citizens give to the now direct question:

Are we to have a system of courts and judges, independent and free of politics, or are we to have puppets that will do the bidding of political masters?

I said above that the result of the Supreme court battle in congress will be determined by the attitude of the country. It is vital that the citizens realize this fact. Since President Roosevelt made no mention during the campaign for reelection in 1936 of plans to reform the Supreme court, there has been no public expression on the subject. There will not be another opportunity for the voters to express their views until November, 1938. The only way, then, open to those who want to express an opinion for or against the court change is by sending their views to their congressmen and senators. Conversations that I have had with members of the house and the senate convinces me that the representatives and senators will appreciate word as to how their constituents feel.

### Up to the People

Further evidence of the desire of congressmen and senators to know the feelings of the voters is given in the tremendous propaganda that is going on. Friends and foes of the Supreme court reform program are on the air nightly; scarcely a day goes by that some senator and usually several of them and numerous congressmen participate in debate or issue statements concerning the great controversy, and from the tremendous source of propaganda supply at the command of the President come countless statements and interviews and radio speeches praising the President's plan. Even the President himself has made one of his famous "fireside chats" telling why he should be given the new power.

In the meantime—and some more strange bedfellows—we find the most peculiar cross currents operating. Among some of the religious groups, there are many who fear that the court packing plan will void constitutional guarantees of religious freedom. They fear eventual control of the churches by the state, having in mind, no doubt what has happened to religious

groups in Germany and Soviet Russia. Editorials from the Catholic press are being circulated privately among many legislators and against these are some Protestant preachers who take the position that the Supreme court is out of date and ought to be reformed. Numerous Jewish leaders are opposing the reform but among the Jews are many who feel that President Roosevelt is right.

Then there is the split among the farm leaders. I refer to farm organizations with national spokesmen. Some are for the change and some against it.

Uppermost in the minds of all the opponents seems to be a fundamental fear that to change the court will open the door through which dictators may walk. To illustrate the type of statements coming forth from observers of national reputation as regards this point, I am going to quote from a recent expression by the distinguished columnist, Westbrook Pegler. Lately he wrote:

"All of a sudden, Mr. Roosevelt discovers that the Supreme court is largely senile and demands quick action on a proposal which, if adopted, would create an easy precedent for the most cynical packing of the Supreme court by someone of the type of Huey Long or Warren Harding, Mussolini or Hitler in years to come. It might not be many years either. . . . All dictators pack the courts by legal means as a preliminary to the promulgation of their dictatorial laws. After that it is comparatively easy to take over, because the courts belong to the dictator and do as he orders."

There can be no question, of course, that the thing Mr. Roosevelt proposes to have congress do for him is legal. Since, however, it is legal in this instance, it will be legal, of course, for someone else to come along after Mr. Roosevelt and pack the court with men of his own choosing, men who will decide questions as the then President desires them to decide. There is no limit to what may come if once the door is opened. Senator Wheeler, the Montana Democrat who has long been outstanding in the liberal character of views he holds, has added to this thought the expression that if the door is to be opened, the people must do it—not the congress that was elected without voters having heard the proposition mentioned.

### They Make Mistakes

As the fight of packing the Supreme court waxes warmer, one can not help noting how even clever politicians make mistakes. There are many who believe that Mr. Roosevelt made a grievous error in proposing revision of the Supreme court in the fashion he chose while there are others who say that he was elected by such a tremendous majority that he will have the people behind him regardless of the character of proposition advanced to congress.

It is interesting to note how many congressmen and senators are dodging the issue. Their silence is positively thunderous because they do not know how the people back home feel about the general proposition. There are others who have come out boldly for one reason or another in support of the plan and there are some 33 or more in the senate who have determined their position already and are ready to fight to the finish to stop passage of such a law.

Then there was the mistake which Senator Robinson of Arkansas, the Democratic leader, made in the senate the other day. He vigorously denounced what he termed propaganda and a conspiracy to defeat the President's plan. He called attention to much newspaper and editorial comment in opposition and accused all of those people indiscriminately with being part of a gigantic conspiracy against the court pack.

The humor of the Robinson outburst seemed not to be apparent to the otherwise kindly mannered senator whom I very much admire. What he did by an hour-long attack in the senate was to re-emphasize all of the criticism of the President's plan. One might refer in this connection also to the explosive type of speech made by Harry Hopkins, relief administrator. Of course, everyone knows that Mr. Hopkins has made his life's work that of looking after suffering humanity. He is on the government pay roll in such a job. Mr. Hopkins attacked all opposition to the President's plan because he said it was in the interest of humanity to do so. The relief administrator made his appeal direct to all of those receiving federal money through relief rolls and that obviously will be taken up by opponents of the President's plan who undoubtedly will say as some already have hinted that Mr. Hopkins is trying to muster relief classes to bring pressure upon congress.

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# What Irvin S. Cobb Thinks about

### Twilight of Knee Pants.

## SANTA MONICA, CALIF.

— Since our diplomatic group must shed the half-portion breeches they've been wearing at official functions abroad, that means others present will quit mistaking them for footmen and start in again mistaking them for waiters, as formerly.

But the under-rigging doesn't make so much difference anyhow. In the best plenipotentiary circles, it's the top dressing that counts—the gold-plated cocked hat; the dress coat loaded with bullion; the bosom crossed with broad ribbons; the lapels and the throat lath so decorated with medals that, alongside one thus costumed, Solomon in all his glory would look absolutely nude.



Irvin S. Cobb

### End of the Holdout Season.

THE baseball season couldn't start off properly unless a certain catastrophe impended beforehand. Every self-respecting player who made a hit last year insists on more salary for this year, else he'll never spit in the palm of another glove. This makes him a holdout. The manager declares the player will take what's offered him and not a cent more. This makes him a manager.

But fear not, little one. They'll all be in there when the governor or the mayor or somebody winds up to launch the first game and tosses the ball nearly eighteen feet in the general direction of the continent of North America.

### Changing Style Capitals.

HOLLYWOOD and not Paris is now the world center for fashions, if you can believe Hollywood—and not Paris.

At any rate, both for men and women, we do originate many style creations which, in the best movie circles, frequently make the women look mannish and the men look effeminate, maybe that's the desired effect; an oldtimer wouldn't know about that.

However, there's a new hat out here for masculine wear which fascinates me. It is a very woolly hat—a nap on it like an old family album—and the crown peaks up in a most winsome way, and there's a rakish bunch of tail-feathers at the back which makes it look as though it might settle down any minute and start laying. I think they got the idea for it from the duck-billed platypus.

### Civilizing Ethiopia.

CONQUERED Ethiopians attempt to assassinate their new overlord, Viceroy Graziani. Nobody is killed, but several individuals get bunged up.

So the conquerors arrest all natives of Addis Ababa in whose huts weapons are found. They round up 2,000 "suspects" out of a total population of 90,000.

So promptly, 1,800 of these black prisoners are put to death in batches. In former days the firing squads would have worn themselves to a frazzle in a rush job of this sort, but no—well, who would deny that the machine gun is the crowning achievement of white culture? Poison gas is also much favored for pacifying rebellious savages, and plane-bombing likewise has its advocates.

### The Public's Short Memory.

FINANCIER, whose exposed devices are as a bad smell in people's nostrils, summarily is ousted from his high place and the shadows swallow up his diminished shape. A little time passes, and, lo, in a new setting, he bobs up, an envied if not an exalted personage. So-called exclusive groups welcome him in; newspapers quote him on this and that; he basks again, like some sleek and overfed lizard, in the sunshine of folks' tolerance—yes, the admiration of some.

No evidence that he has repented of his former practices; no sign of intent to repay any broken victim of those fiduciary operations. The private fortune which he took with him when he quit is still all his. And maybe there's the secret of this magical restoration to the favor of the multitude.

IRVIN S. COBB.  
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### Budapest Catacombs

The Budapest catacombs date back to the days when the Fort of Buda was held by the Turks, marking the farthest fortified advance of the forces of Islam into Christendom. They were probably intended as avenues of escape for a beleaguered garrison, but they also have fresh water wells in them, and some of the chambers were used as repositories for great numbers of human skulls and bones, as in the case of the catacombs at Rome.

# STAR DUST

Movie • Radio  
By VIRGINIA VALE

THE biggest sensation of the year in motion pictures is the success of Ritz Brothers, those three wild-eyed comics who rush into "On the Avenue" like a tornado and break up the show. They work with such whirlwind speed that in a stunt lasting only three to five minutes on the screen, they use up more genuinely comic material than most comedians develop in a lifetime. So, having made three pictures in their first five months on the screen, the boys have gone off to Miami.

Expert dancers rave about the Ritz Brothers' dancing; singers are sure that they must have had operatic training; actors suspect that they played in stock for years to develop the lightning-like flash of their line delivery. But according to Harry Ritz himself—he's the hardest working one in all their sketches—they have never had a dancing or singing or elocution lesson in their lives.

For days Joan Bennett had all of her friends in a perfect fever of excitement while she made up her mind about going to New York for a stage engagement. Back in New York Margaret Sullivan had announced that she was going to withdraw from the cast of "Stage Door," because she is going to play a mother role in real life soon. The producer thought it would be a grand idea to get Joan to take over her part. She was quite interested, and Walter Wanger, to whom she is under contract, said he was willing to let her go. But that wily Walter Wanger showed Joan the costume sketches for "Vogues of 1937" and that settled it.



Joan Bennett

If you have been wondering what Arthur Tracy, the Street Singer so long popular on the radio, has been up to, you'll soon see for yourselves. In "Backstage," a picture he recently made in London, he plays opposite Anna Neagle, the Gaumont-British star. Tillie Loach is in it too, the exquisite dancer whose hands writhed so seductively in "Garden of Allah."

Clark Gable, who thinks that Robert Taylor is a great romantic actor, and Robert Taylor who thinks that Clark Gable is tops, have persuaded Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer to let them make a picture together. The story selected is "Spurs of Pride," a military story by Percival Wren.

There is a serious shortage of beautiful chorus girls in Hollywood right now, because all the studios are making big musicals. Girls who could not even get a few days extra work while the studios were all busy on dramatic pictures, are now signing ten-week contracts calling for as much as \$200 a week. Samuel Goldwyn's chief complaint about the beautiful girls who come to Hollywood seeking work is that they invariably try to look like some popular star, instead of being beautiful in their own way. The one sure way not to get an engagement in one of his pictures is to have someone tell him that you look just like Virginia Bruce, or Carole Lombard.

When Kathryn Witwer, popular MBS prima donna, first came to Chicago to win fame and fortune, she had exactly \$5 in her purse and some secretarial training which she traded for music lessons. First prize in a National Music Clubs federation contest won her a chance to appear with Frederick Stock and also with Mary Garden at the Chicago Civic Opera. After her successful opera debut her home town of Gary, Ind., sent her to Europe for further study.

ODDS AND ENDS—Marlene Dietrich has confided to a few close friends, who told several thousand other people, that Merle Oberon is going to marry Brian Aherne soon in London. Remember the love scenes in "Beloved Enemy"? Evidently they weren't just acting. . . . Ed Bergen, the ventriloquist who has made such an outstanding success on the Vaudeville hour, has been put under contract to make pictures for Warner Brothers. . . . Barbara Stanwyck has a huge new ruby ring, a gift from Robert Taylor. Incidentally, when handed her check for five thousand dollars for a three-minute sketch on the radio recently, Barbara got the giggles. She suddenly recalled that just twelve years ago she was mightily pleased to get a night club job at thirty-five dollars a week.

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### Spending Youth

Youth is not like a new garment, which we can keep fresh and fair by wearing sparingly. Youth, while we have it, we must wear daily, and it will fast wear away.—J. Foster.

### Making One's Mark

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