DIE S COMMITTEE CALLED UPON TO HEAR TESTIMONY OF RESPONSIBLE WPA OFFICIALS IN HEARINGS ON FEDERAL ARTS PROJECTS

Ellen S. Woodward, Assistant Works Progress Administrator who heads the division including all Federal Arts Projects, today made public a letter to Congressman Martin Dies, Chairman of the House Committee investigating un-American activities, calling attention to the Committee's failure to call any responsible WPA official in its inquiry concerning the Federal Theatre and Federal Writers' projects.

Citing the record of accomplishment by the Writers' project, now under investigation at hearings in New York, and quoting the praise of numerous distinguished critics and authors, Mrs. Woodward said she believed failure to summon those responsible for the projects' direction would forfeit the confidence of the American people in the hearings of the Dies Committee.

The letter follows:

"Through the press it has come to my attention that your Committee is conducting an investigation of certain of the Federal Arts projects of the Works Progress Administration. These projects come under the jurisdiction of the Division of Women's and Professional Projects, of which, as Assistant Works Progress Administrator, I am the head.

"I regret very much that neither your general committee nor your subcommittee now meeting in New York has seen fit to call for testimony from any official responsible for the administration of this work.

"You will agree with me, I know, that one of the traditional safeguards of American justice is recognition of the right of a hearing. To depart from that principle is to forfeit the right to any confidence on the part of the American people in the findings of the Committee.

"Immediately upon learning that you were investigating charges in connection with their work, the National Directors of both the Federal Theatre and the Federal Writers' Projects have, as you know, volunteered to
appear before your Committee. I gave instructions that the full facilities of those Projects should be placed at the disposal of the Committee to provide any information that you might desire.

"In insisting that these officials be heard, we do so in the belief that a work of very great value is at stake.

"Among the larger volumes issued by the Federal Writers' Project thus far are State Guides for Idaho, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Iowa, Mississippi, Delaware; City Guides for Philadelphia, Pa., Rochester, N.Y., New Orleans, La., Augusta, Ga., Chillicothe, Ohio, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Dubuque, Iowa, Cape Cod, Newcastle, Del., Savannah, Ga., St. Augustine, Fla., San Antonio, Tex., San Diego, Cal.; also Route No. 1 and the Ocean Highway.

"I shall not attempt to outline in the brief space of a letter the vast number of favorable expressions we have had from qualified critics, but I do feel justified in mentioning a few of these to indicate the trend.

"Yesterday, the very day your subcommittee was conducting hearings on activities connected with the Federal Writers' Project in New York, the first volume of the New York City Guide, entitled 'New York Panorama', was reviewed in New York newspapers.

"Ralph Thompson of the New York Times wrote: 'For when we of this generation are all dust and ashes and forgotten, sturdy individualists and collectivists alike, dirty radicals and true Americans, Hooverites and dangerous New Dealers, crackpots, spendthrifts, embattled suburban dames and craven takers of relief, the American Guide Series will be still very much in evidence. And not only in evidence but in use: our children will be thankful for it, and their children, and their children's children. It is certainly one of the most valuable series of books ever issued in the United States.'

"Lewis Gannett of the Herald Tribune said: 'They were unemployed, these authors who, under the Federal Writers' Project of the W.P.A., found work in the preparation of this book. But unemployment did not warp their vision. They saw New York clearly, and they saw it whole..... The city and the country can be proud that, putting men to work in crisis, they produced such books as this. Proud that the men did the work, proud that the city inspired them...!'

"Mark Van Doren, eminent critic and author, found 'New York Panorama' the best of a series in which he has enjoyed every volume, a guide book 'planned with imagination, carried out with enthusiasm and learning, and brilliantly written.'

"Van Wyck Brooks, likewise eminent as author and critic, found 'New York Panorama' a book 'admirably edited and written' and said of the whole series in a letter to National Director Alseberg:

"I have meant to write to you many times about the magnificent work you are doing. From my point of view, it is the most exciting thing that has happened in America for years, and I could not not begin to say how much I have enjoyed the guidebooks.'

"John Erskine wrote of the first volume of the New York Guide, 'You have my congratulations on the many excellent things in it.'

"Alfred Kreymborg, a distinguished poet, said of the same volume, 'It is a magnificent work, as an old New Yorker can testify.'

"Robert W. G. Vail, Librarian of the American Antiquarian Society, writes: 'When the Federal Writers' Project was inaugurated, I was not a little skeptical of the value of the publications they might be able to produce. ... Now that the publications are beginning to appear, I want to tell you how mistaken I was and how happy I am that the Writers' Project has been so eminently successful.'

"Dorothy Canfield Fisher, the distinguished author, writes in similar vein of the Vermont Guide. Harpers Magazine joined in praise of the work in reviewing the first of the New England Guides, the Massachusetts volume. Lewis Mumford found the American Guide Series one of the best 'of all the good uses of adversity.'"
"So runs the file, including expressions not only from critics and authors but from professors of history and literature, Congressmen, Cabinet officers and numerous officials of Federal, State and local governments, as well as from the heads of many learned societies.

"The Writers' Project has published or has ready for the publisher 150 books, aggregating 12,500,000 words, and 250 additional books are in process of preparation. Quantitatively this is the greatest editorial job ever undertaken in this country. Guides, text books, historic studies -- the entire range of publications -- are designed for lasting usefulness and with no thought of propaganda for any faction or party in America.

"In view of this record of accomplishment in an administration that has taken every possible precaution against discrimination because of political convictions and has maintained a complete system for the remedy of grievances, I feel that it is only fair that those responsible for the work have a chance to be heard by your Committee.

"Believing that you will recognize the fairness of this request, I will not attempt at this time to answer all of the many unjust and unfounded criticisms of these projects which have appeared in press accounts of various witnesses before your Committee."