Confession Observer Tells Second Session Delights

EDITOR'S NOTE: Following is an eye-witness account for Women's News of the second session of the Louisiana Constitutional Convention written by Mrs. Robert S. Osborne who is president of the Lafayette League of Women Voters. She is attending as a League observer, but this account is not intended to represent League position on the issues.

The second week of the Louisiana Constitutional Convention got underway in the large arena usually housing pageants, wrestling matches and rock shows, and was even more interesting than the first. The atmosphere was of excitement as the pressure was on for committees to complete their proposals for submission to the full convention. A provision prohibiting dual office-holding was under discussion when I entered the Committee on the Executive Department on Thursday morning. An amendment by Alphonse Jackson Jr. delegate and official of the Louisiana Education Association was offered to exempt teachers on the basis that teachers should not be prohibited from serving and holding certain public offices. A minister from New Orleans spoke up about the need of the "little people" who are forced to make ends meet. He felt that if someone worked all day at a Federal Government job then wanted to work a few hours more sweeping the floor of a state or local government office, he should be allowed to do so.

Difficult To Write

The committee was not able to agree on wording that would carry out the intent of the provision to prohibit holding two public offices and doing no work for the pay received for one of them. The provision would make teachers "second class citizens" and the minister said it was like "burning down the barn to get the rat." They discussed using a Board of Ethics to settle disputes but Joe Anzalone, a New Orleans attorney, said there were 10,000 people there holding two public jobs and that if a board had to review all those cases it would take years. He felt that it was much more important to make laws that will prevent an evil in government without working a hardship on people. The committee submitted the section to the convention as a separate provision.

During the coffee break I talked with Mrs. Hilda Brien, a graduate nurse serving on the Parish Board of Elections in Houma appointed by Governor Edwards to represent the voters and the consumer. She expressed concern over the provision in the Bill of Rights which she feels would "cripple the whole consumer movement" and make it impossible for the State of Louisiana to regulate the quality and pricing of any product. She has her amendment ready to present when the Bill of Rights gets to the floor.

Conflicting Interests Noted

During the afternoon Natural Resources and Environment got into something of a rut about preserving buildings and sites of historical interest. There was an atmosphere of excitement as the pressure was on for committees to complete their proposals for submission to the full convention. A provision prohibiting dual office-holding was under discussion when I entered the Committee on the Executive Department on Thursday morning. An amendment by Alphonse Jackson Jr. delegate and official of the Louisiana Education Association was offered to exempt teachers on the basis that teachers should not be prohibited from serving and holding certain public offices. A minister from New Orleans spoke up about the need of the "little people" who are forced to make ends meet. He felt that if someone worked all day at a Federal Government job then wanted to work a few hours more sweeping the floor of a state or local government office, he should be allowed to do so.

In Control

The atmosphere was in strong contrast to the morning meeting where the discussion had been orderly, impersonal and objective. When Chairman Rayburn was asked, for adjournment, whether he had the power to halt such outbursts, he said he did but thought maybe it was best to let them blow off steam early in the game. The Friday, July 13, session was the first opportunity for delegates to discuss in full session what will actually go into the constitution. Section 1 (A), under the Legislative Department, stating that the legislature shall be composed of a Senate and a House of Representatives was adopted by 103 Yeas and 8 Nays. An amendment requiring single member districts in both houses was adopted. The only opposition was against locking the provision into the constitution in the event that population growth would make it impractical in some areas.