Rayburn Criticism of Convention Eyed

By C. M. HARGRODER

Baton Rouge, La.—Hope- fully, Sen. B. B. “Sixty” Rayburn of Bogalusa speaks for himself— and only himself. Rayburn, restless in his seat in the late afternoon, last week criticized the Constitutional Convention for being so cautious in perfecting its permanent rules of operation and procedure.

Those who know the senator in the Legislature realize that rarely does he get perturbed during the morning. It usually comes after lunch for some reason. Last week was no exception. He rose to complain that the Convention was spending too much time on the rules.

Then he added—and he must have had a reason—that if anyone wanted to defeat the final document which the Convention proposes, all he had to say was that it cost $200,000 for the rules alone. Of course it was an exaggeration (Rayburn is frequently given to that to gain his point), but it led observers to wonder whether the professional politicians really want to see the people get a new constitution.

There is none so professional a politician as is Rayburn. His district has returned him many times to the legislature. This term will complete 28 years for him, and he had four years on the police jury before that.

No one would deny that he has had his successes, and certainly no one would question his knowledge of politics, and to a lesser but still formidable extent, government. Yet there appeared to be two situations in which he had to say in his criticism, suggestions he may not have put in added, but which at least sounded like threats:

—That he might oppose the constitution once it is written.

—That as chairman of the legislative budget committee he wanted the convention to know that he was in the position of questioning their spending, and other legislators might also do so.

Rayburn, of course, is well aware of the importance of rules in the legislative process. He uses them himself to good advantage in the Senate. And he knows, too, the time required to devise those rules. The 1972 Senate spent approximately its first week arguing over the extensive work of a Senate committee on rules before that session.

The veteran legislator was critical of the convention for contending over the placement of a comma, a semicolon. But how often has he himself used the absence of punctuation in picking a bill to death on the Senate floor?

Legislative members of the convention—whether they sought their seats by election or by appointment of the governor—had best reconsider any restlessness they may feel over the time the convention spent on its rules. They have long days of just such deliberations ahead in this convention when they reach the substance of the document. Such bodies as the convention do not move as rapidly as the legislature, nor do the people want the convention to do so.

We need less of the mistakes the legislature frequently makes in its own operations, costly mistakes because lawmakers must correct them in subsequent sessions. This is exactly what the people of Louisiana have complained of in the present constitution. They want the job done and done right to eliminate any need to come back to them year after year to correct what a careless legislature presented in an earlier amendment.

Legislators in the convention and out would do well to listen to a very capable collection of delegates, most of whom were elected to do the job (as legislators themselves often say when criticized for the job they do).