

TALLULAH BANKHEAD LOBBIES "UNCLE JOHN" FOR THE FEDERAL THEATRE PROJECT

To Washington on June 20 flew Tallulah Bankhead, daughter of the Speaker of the House, and a delegation of actors, producers and playwrights to plead against discontinuance of the Federal Theatre Project as fated in the 1940 Relief Bill passed by the House the week before. The destinies of 8,000 jobless theatrical people now lay with the Senate. To convert it to her views Miss Bankhead mingled tears with statistics and clingingly cajoled her "Uncle John" (Senator John H. Bankhead of Alabama).

Among her less emotional arguments for the FTP were: that it had created new audiences for the American theater; that 2,500 of its performers had stepped up and out into regular jobs on Broadway and in Hollywood in the last three years; that it had developed new techniques of dramaturgy; that it was partially self-sustaining; and that the people of the theater traditionally lent themselves to charitable causes.

But a great many Senators who listened knew good counter-arguments

for FTP's discontinuance. The opposition was best articulated by the *New York Daily News*, which wrote: "We think that art is inherently competitive . . . that you cannot bring forth first-rate art by subsidizing second-rate artists . . . that the kindest way to combat stage unemployment would be to let unemployed actors go on ordinary work relief like anybody else."

As the week wore on, a lively crusade for FTP seemed to be swaying Congressional sentiment. New York's Mayor LaGuardia went to Washington and espoused the actors' cause. Playwrights George Abbott and George Kaufman, Producers Sam Harris and Lee Shubert, Actresses Katharine Cornell and Helen Hayes signed a public plea. On June 20 Senator Wagner introduced an amendment which, if enacted, would permit the Project to continue. Most interesting point raised was Mrs. Roosevelt's retort to the charge that FTP harbored Communists. "I wonder," she wrote, "if Communists occupied in producing plays are not safer than Communists starving to death."



A hug for Senator Bankhead started his niece's lobby for the Federal Theatre Project. Cried she: "Uncle John, you'll vote to do something for the unemployed actors!" "No, I don't think I will," grunted Uncle John. When the gagging was over, Miss Bankhead ap-

peared before the Senate subcommittee and made an eloquent appeal for the Project. Two days later Uncle John wired her: "I tried 24 hours to find a weak place in your masterful argument . . . but have failed. Check me off as voting for the Project. Love. Uncle John."