

See this? He finally did it!

MAGAZINE PAGE THREE



Kefauver's Last Fight

MARQUIS CHILDS

Washington. The waters of oblivion have a disconcerting way in this capital of rolling over the reputation of a departed office-holder almost before the eulogies have ceased. But Estes Kefauver of Tennessee promises to be an exception to this unhappy rule if only because he stood for certain unhappy held beliefs above and beyond the erosion of easy compromise.

Whether his last big drive—to investigate the power of American drug manufacturers to enforce high if not prohibitive prices for wonder drugs in Latin America—will be scuttled is the question of today. Prospects are not bright.

The Senator from Tennessee has a monument in the greatly strengthened drug bill that followed the thalidomide scandal and in an anti-merger law putting more teeth into the anti-trust statutes. But his real achievement is in the massive record built up beginning in 1957 on his investigation of "administered prices" in bread, autos, steel and other areas in the economy where monopoly keeps price tags high.

Proposing to investigate the prices of American drugs in the Latin-American market, Kefauver ran into a buzz-saw. His associates believe his experience so shocked and saddened him that it contributed to his fatal heart attack.

McKesson & Robbins went into Columbia and began selling antibiotics and other drugs under their generic rather than their brand names. This meant a saving many times over to the consumer. But pharmaceutical houses were outraged and McKesson charged them with shutting off sup-

When Kefauver proposed to investigate they turned the heat on friendly Senators. Kefauver's anti-monopoly subcommittee was blocked by the full Justice Committee. Kefauver looked on with a growing sense of helplessness.

Finally Kefauver was granted a hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. To the hearing came Thomas G. (Tommy the Cork of the New Deal era) Corcoran, representing his brother, David, president of Sterling Products, a drug company with a large operation in Latin America. Corcoran's law partner, Edward H. Foley, represents the pharmaceutical manufacturers' association.

Corcoran told the committee that even the proposal of an investigation had been blown up in sensational newspapers in Brazil and elsewhere to show that American drug firms were guilty of trying to extort criminally high prices. This would be used by political demagogues to justify confiscation of the American drug business and that, Corcoran warned, would be another blow to foreign aid in Congress.

Sen. Morse, chairman of the Latin-American subcommittee, sided with Corcoran. Kefauver felt that his allies of the past had deserted him.

The other day Sen. Hart of Michigan, who succeeded to the chairmanship of the anti-monopoly committee, got a vote of all eight members approving a resolution keeping in force the subpoenas issued for records of the big drug houses. But when the showdown comes on whether to investigate or not, the chances are that he will have only two votes—his own and that of Sen. Dodd.