

## A BIRD IN HAND....

It seems unfortunate, not to say suicidal, that some folklore scholars appear to be in opposition to the proposed American Folklife Foundation now before Congress. A bill to establish such a Foundation has been introduced into the Senate by Ralph Yarborough (D-Texas), sponsored by William Fulbright (D-Arkansas). The bill, S1591, was prepared by Ralph Rinzler and Sam Stanley of the Smithsonian Institution and is currently in the Labor and Welfare Committee of the Senate. The Foundation, if established, will make available grants to institutions for the development of programs in American folklife, scholarships to individuals working in the field, funds to encourage collection in various regions and to develop a greater public awareness of our folk cultural heritage.

Such a bill ought to be cause for great excitement, especially in light of the NDEA troubles of a few years ago. We strongly encourage our colleagues to write immediately to the members of Labor and Welfare, urging them to pass the bill out of committee; Their names are printed below. We find it disturbing to learn that some folklore and folklife scholars oppose the Foundation as it is presently conceived. The reception that was accorded Sam Stanley's presentation of plans for the Foundation at the 1968 American Folklore Society Meeting, is indicative of this attitude. Naturally there is room for legitimate disagreement over the terms of the bill; such is the case with any proposed law or plan. But we have the impression that too many of the objections that are being raised (and, alas, we have news of this chiefly via oral tradition) are trifling and reflect over-sensitivity rather than any sensible approach to criticism.

The assertion that the program aims at a negative sort of popularization is doubtful; the insinuation that the Smithsonian will "take over" existing (and certainly under financed!) programs is absurd. To suggest that the individuals in charge of formulating the Foundation are not "professionally" trained in folklore reflects a rather exaggerated self-image. Certainly no one has presented any alternative legislative program aimed at encouraging the concerted study of American folk culture.

The bill is an excellent one and its authors are to be congratulated on their sensitive writing of it. With such influential leaders as Yarborough and Fulbright supporting it folklife studies may be coming into their own. We simply must support the bill wholeheartedly.

Copies of the bill can be obtained from Rayna Green, c/o Folklore Institute. The members of the Senate Labor and Welfare Committee are:

Democrats: James Randolph (W. Va.), Edward Kennedy (Mass.), Claiborne Pell (R.I.), Harrison Williams (N.J.), Gaylord Nelson (Wisc.), Walter Mondale (Minn.), Thomas Eagleton (Mo.), Allan Cranston (Cal.), Harold Hughes (Iowa). Republicans: Jacob Javits (N.Y.), Winston Prouty, Peter Dominich (Col.), George Murphy (Cal.), Richard Schweiker (Penn.), Henry Bellman (Okla.), William Saxbe.