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THE SALE OF AMBASSADORSHIPS

By Oswald Garrison Villard.

Sorry as one may be for the new American Ambassador to Moscow, Joseph E. Davies, and his wife, who have been subjected to such pitiless publicity, nonetheless the outspoken criticisms of the appointment are a profoundly hopeful sign. Ambassadorships have been sold in return for campaign contributions again and again as long as anyone can remember, but usually such appointments have been made without protest by the press. Personally I have for years been denouncing appointments of this kind and I have maintained that anyone who contributes to campaign funds should thereby automatically be barred from receiving any federal office whatsoever.

Bryan's Tactics.

If I were a member of Congress a bill to this effect would be the first that I should introduce. I took the same position during the Wilson Administration which I helped to elect and supported until we went into the war. Although President Wilson had been for years a Vice President of the Civil Service Reform Association and had always denounced in his writings everything of the kind, he promptly turned over the diplomatic service to Mr. Bryan and allowed him to dispose of the offices as he saw fit. Mr. Bryan followed the time-honored course of parcelling out the ambassadorships to socially ambitious persons who had contributed largely to the campaign fund.

Never did retribution of a wrongful misuse of the appointive power come as quickly or as patently, but unfortunately it was the American people who paid the bill. Among the first to press their claims in the days after Mr. Bryan's appointment was announced, when he was spending the time until inauguration in Florida, was James W. Gerard. The amount that he contributed was then put at \$13,500, and with admirable frankness he told the newspaper men that he had come to Florida to see what he was going to get for this money. He drew Berlin. F. C. Penfield, whose wife contributed \$50,000, got Vienna. William C. Sharp received Paris, with Walter Page, who had been a warm personal friend and backer of Wilson, received London where he was supported, it was always said, by Cleveland H. Dodge. The latter had been one of the largest contributors to the Wilson campaign fund, Mr. Page not having any money with which to meet the terrific expenses of an Ambassador to London.

Wilson and Page

So it happened that when the World War came, the key positions in our diplomatic service in Europe were held by men for whom Mr. Wilson had little or no use, or, soon after the war began, came wholly to distrust and dislike, as was evidenced by his refusal to answer letters from Walter Page, or to receive him when he came to this country during the war until he was compelled to do so.

I personally know exactly what he thought of Mr. Gerard and his work in Berlin, and as long as there are any living who know the inside history of the Wilson Administration there will be those to believe that if a real diplomat had been in Germany instead of Gerard, someone who by the force of his personality had really been able to impress himself upon the German Government, we might never have been drawn into the war. It was partly because of this situation in the four leading embassies that Colonel House was repeatedly sent to Europe by President Wilson -- in itself a move greatly to be criticized, but due, as I have said, in part to his not wishing to see what was happening to Europe solely through the eyes of the four men who were supposed to be his chief diplomatic reporters and advisors. No one who reads the Walter Page letters with an open mind can deny the fact that instead of being a representative of the United States at the Court of St. James' really became an agent, or at least the complete reflector of the views of the British Government.

Mr. Davies' "Qualifications":

As for the Davies appointment, it is altogether bad. The very fact that his wife is a woman of such enormous wealth should have prevented his receiving this appointment, and so should his having contributed to the campaign fund. It appears to be true that Mr. Davies was sent to Moscow merely because that happened to be the only ambassadorial vacancy. He has obviously no special qualifications for the post. He has never shown any interest in Russia, nor has he had any previous diplomatic post. The announcement that he and his wife are taking 2,000 pounds of frozen cream to make themselves comfortable in Russia, besides a number of electric refrigerators, and a moving picture outfit with plenty of films to show the benighted Russians how we care for the destitute and poor in America, ought to make Franklin Roosevelt wince sufficiently to find some other place "equally as good" as the politicians say, for these beneficiaries of the Post cornflake and Postum \$20,000,000. If there ever was an ambassadorship the holder of which should live in the simplest possible way without splurge of any kind it is this one in Moscow. Our representative there should live in keeping with the drab poverty of the country to which he is assigned with just as little ostentation as possible. The very fact that Russia is an anti-capitalistic nation should have debarred Mr. and Mrs. Davies, these prime products of our unfair and unjust American system. What that job calls for is a Benjamin Franklin, or a Thomas Jefferson, someone as simple and unpretentious as they were in their official intercourse abroad.

"Slap in the Face"

I have not spoken thus far of the injury an appointment like this does to our permanent diplomatic service. What are we creating such a service for if not to fill the most delicate positions by men who have had a lifelong experience in preparation for just such grave responsibilities? Now I admit frankly that no diplomatic service should be so rigid as to preclude the appointment of a man from the outside public life to a vital post. The British were wise enough to take James Bryce and put him in Washington because no Englishman knew the United States better, was more widely known, and was more highly regarded in the United States. The man who should have been Ambassador to Berlin in the trying time of the war was Charles Nagel

or someone else who knew Germany, spoke the language, understood the German character, and was bound to impress himself upon the German Government by his forcefulness, his ability to interpret the best in the United States to them, and his power. He was a Republican so of course he could not have gone. I cite him merely as a type -- and there were others. Alanson Houghton who did so well in Berlin after the war, was eminently qualified for the task. Let us always leave some places for men of distinction and especial fitness, but they should be men who have not contributed to any campaign fund. We have in Vienna a most admirable man for the Legation there, George S. Messersmith. No husband of a multimillionaire wife that I have heard of could equal him in preeminent fitness for his delicate job -- he might well have been promoted to Moscow. Mr. Messersmith is a career diplomat of many years of useful service. Why should he and others like him not have the right to look forward to an ambassadorship to round out their careers? The appointment of Joseph E. Davies to Russia is a slap in the face of every career man from the most newly appointed vice-consul up.

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