

Quiet Of Wilson Funeral The Calm Before A Storm

Integrity of Government at Washington Assailed and Lighthouse of Publicity Now Beginning Again to Play Pitilessly and Fiercely on Acts of Public Officials

By DAVID LAWRENCE
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Washington, Feb. 6.—The integrity of the Government—a theme which only rarely in American history has been projected into the realm of controversy—stands today as the issue overshadowing all else in the national capital.

The calm that has been enforced by the adjournment of all activities out of respect to the memory of Woodrow Wilson is but the stillness that precedes the storm. The limelight will play fiercely in the next few weeks on the motives of public men and their influence in Governmental action in and out of office.

Reputations are at stake, political advantages and disadvantages are bound to accrue, innocent acts will be subject to misconstruction—it's all part of the confusion that has developed out of one of the worst scandals of the present generation.

True enough a presidential campaign is on, but there are disinterested men in Congress who deplore the whole oil mess as a possible reflection on the competency of public officials and an encouragement for those who would do away with both the old political parties and start afresh a third party today as in 1912.

The lobbyists of the past, the highly paid lawyers who were hired because of their "influence" with the administration in power, the making of contracts for Government property without public bids, the removal of resources from Government control without regard to the needs of the Government itself—the whole discloses a drama of selfishness and materialism which will have a profound effect in the conduct of affairs here.

The passing of bribes to get favorable Governmental action has long since become obsolete. The extension of "loans" to public officials is but one of a number of devices whereby an individual conscience is assuaged but which never-the-less has accomplished the purpose for which it was given. Again and again it has been apparent that promises of positions in commercial life to men who would resign after handling favorably a case between the Government and a private concern are numerous. The Government itself has paid its high grade men relatively low salaries compared with the incomes given for the same class of work in commercial life. The temptations of position and income outside the Government have been dangled before officials. Indeed, not a few men have actually gone into the Government service with the ultimate purpose of meeting business people who in later years would help them make a favorable connection. The turnover in personnel in recent years in certain departments of the Government has been amazing.

Even members of Congress whose salaries are insufficient for their needs have maintained connections with law firms that have engaged in practice before Government departments. Many former members of Congress have settled down to settle here. Most of them are doing a legitimate business asking for no more than any other lawyers or agents would ask and simply using their intimate knowledge of the conduct of public business and red-tape in particular to aid their clients. Some have become simply legislative lobbyists endeavoring constantly to influence the course of legislation for the interests they represent and

Won't Speak



Former Secretary of Interior Albert B. Fall (left) went before the Senate Investigating Committee, but refused to discuss oil leases granted by him.

which pay them for that effort. How long after an official has held power shall he be prohibited from practicing before Government departments? What business connections should be retained by men in office? These are questions of ethics largely, but the Congress will no doubt revive proposals hitherto made that a sharp line of demarcation be made so that men in positions of responsibility shall not be subject to the influences and temptations which constantly surround them.

The Teapot Dome scandal is of no recent origin. Murmurs were uttered about it when Secretary Fall made

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the leases. Whispers were heard then that something was wrong but so deep-seated was the faith in President Harding's sincerity, that what he approved was regarded at the time as necessarily all right. The chances are he never knew the details of the oil controversy. He always relied on the memoranda given him by his cabinet officer and he never would have questioned Secretary Fall's judgment. Indeed Mr. Fall himself probably believes to this day that the leases were in the interest of the Government and that the private loan made to him by E. L. Doheny was not a factor in his conclusions.

The Investigating committee has only begun its penetrating quiz. Mr. Fall will be asked to testify again. William Gibbs McAdoo, who was counsel for Doheny on Mexican matters, has requested an opportunity to be heard; as has former Secretary Daniels who wants to answer criticisms about his policy. Thus far the controversy turns on Mr. Fall's acts and Secretary Deuby's approval of the contracts. All the other testimony will be given largely to prevent improper inferences from being drawn with respect to those who wish to defend themselves and also to develop the whole truth about the extension of oil reserves to private interests in recent years.

ON BUYING TRIP
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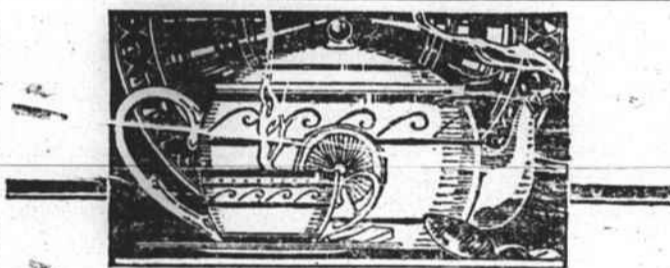
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