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PHILADELPHIA, MARCH 8, 1924

What's the Hurry?

TEAPOT DOME is more than a scandal. It is a symbol—a symbol of the American attitude towards the nation's resources. That attitude has been slowly changing during the past twenty years, but it is still the dominant one in many parts of the country.

Our Government began life with an embarrassment of natural riches. Anyone could have about anything that he wanted for the asking, and often even that simple formality was regarded as unnecessary. Finders were takers and keepers. There was incredible wealth in the ground and above the ground. And there was incredible waste in digging it up and cutting it down. Slow growth, steady growth, sound growth was not good enough for the last generation, and it is not good enough for us.

We have not only hunted our game but we have slaughtered it. We have not only conquered the wilderness but we have destroyed it. We have not only developed our country but we have gutted it. We have not only populated the land but we are trying to Chinify it. We are not building a great nation, but destroying one.

It was only toward the last of our great national potlatch that the Government—or rather a few farsighted men like Roosevelt and Pinchot in the Government—took alarm and managed to hold out some splendid forests, some rich oil and coal lands, and some wilderness areas for national parks. It took a fight to save these assets for the nation. It has been a constant fight to hold them. The era of free land is gone. Only the will to grab is left.

A thin line has stood guard over the salvage, and fought the fight against aggressive greed. The public, for the most part careless and indifferent, has stood on the side lines, too busy with its own affairs to concern itself with the great public questions that affect it so profoundly. From time to time there have been hysterical outbursts of rage over some too raw deal, some too flagrant disregard of the popular will, but the people have never been wholly on the job. They have been more concerned with surface symptoms than with causes, more swayed by sentiment than by reflection, more responsive to emotional propaganda than to cold facts. The kind of necktie that an official wears, his mother-in-law's opinions, a whispered innuendo, an oft-repeated and baseless "Did you hear that —?"

or a sensible speech full of wholesome and unwelcome truth, is more often the cause of a loss of public favor than any real analysis of an official's qualifications or lack of them. Hence we have the demagogue who promises everything, and the grafter who takes anything.

Though the public soon tires, the fellow who wants something never quits, never forgets—especially the people's habit of forgetting. So we find him scheming to trim the Indians; to slice a piece off one of the national parks; to nose into another for power and water; to reclaim and irrigate everything in sight, even though much land under the plow is half-cultivated and half-bankrupt; to settle innocents on semiarid ranges that can never return a living to the farmer; to flood the country with cheap labor, though we have millions of unassimilated and unassimilable aliens already. And all to what end? More great fortunes, more great slums; more jazz, less real joy in life; more climbing, less contentment; more froth and less substance; more hurry, less reflection; more hell-raising and less character building.

This is about the net of what this quick money buys for the individual and what it does to the nation. But decency in the acquirement of wealth and moderation in the exercise of power are the standards which the country must demand of its business leaders, no less than of its officials.

Teapot Dome and all that it symbolizes are the logical outgrowth of our old attitude toward our natural resources. Many men with clear ideas of right and wrong about private property still consider that government land, water, oil and coal are nobody's land, water, oil and coal; that government money is nobody's money; that the first is fair game for the strong and unscrupulous; and that the second may be spent magnificently, carelessly, even wastefully, and that it is really nobody's business.

These ideas are being slowly displaced; they must be wholly displaced, as they will be when the voter finally understands that nobody's natural resources are his natural resources; that when conserved and properly used, these assets will make life pleasanter, happier and more prosperous for him personally; that nobody's money is his money, and that it is deducted to the last penny from his salary, wages and dividends.

Many of our public servants appreciate, all must appreciate, that these natural resources, this tax money, are a sacred trust, to be conserved and administered as carefully as a private trust for which an executor is held responsible by the courts.

Teapot Dome points to government ownership, in the opinion of the partisans of Government in business. On the contrary, it points away from it. But it does point to higher standards both in private business and in public life. And those standards must be set by the people in their own affairs and imposed on the officials they elect.

Public standards will never rise higher than private standards. From the nature of the case, public methods can never rise so high. Corrupt private business cannot get anywhere except with corrupt public officials. Dishonest men cannot get and hold office except with the tacit consent of the people. If there are incompetence and corruption in office now, more government ownership will simply mean more incompetence and corruption.

We have a reserve of natural resources that the Government does and should own, but not operate. When it comes time to work or release any of these resources, the Government's function should be to drive a good bargain and to make sure that private operation is so conducted as to protect the best present and future interests of the country. Not more public ownership, but a better public conscience is needed.

Teapot Dome, though significant of an American attitude toward its natural resources, may easily be exaggerated as a symptom of conditions in Washington, especially just now while we are running down the offenders with dogs, with old boy Politics baying along in the lead. Undoubtedly there is plenty of carelessness and incompetence in Washington. Of actual corruption we do not believe there is a great deal. But a nation that can see nothing in a primeval forest except lumber; in a waterfall except power; in its natural resources and beauty except quick money with which to buy houses and yachts, women

and wine, is in a bad way. If the Senate inquiry teaches us that these things are not the sole end of man, if it curbs the rampaging livewire, booster, go-getter, jazz spirit of the day in some degree, we can well spare the oil.

Corrupt officials, and those corrupt and corrupting business men who are the exponents of the doctrine of grab and loot, are the real agents of the Bolsheviks in this country, the true propagandists for Communism and revolution. And they are a greater danger to the peace and security of the Republic than the Reds.

It is because of the insatiable greed of the few that the great body of honest business men is hampered and hamstrung by governmental restrictions imposed in an effort to curb the unfair, the ruthless and the dishonest. Beneath all this soak-the-rich talk there is a blind groping to reach the rapacious, the predatory rich. These men are the greatest enemies that honest business has. It is the dirty rich who are responsible for the legislative woes that afflict the clean rich and the decent American business men. To them we owe the multiplication of commissions, bureaus, snoopings, red tape, interference with legitimate activities, corrupt officials and dirty politics. They have no party but their pocket, no politics but privilege. Unless they are destroyed they will destroy the nation.

Mr. Wilson

TIME alone, and by slow degrees, sums up the only appraisals of the great ones of earth that can be of much use to posterity. At least a generation must pass before the clouds and vapors of passion and prejudice, idolatry and hatred are blown away and the commanding figure stands in the clear light of the past. In these matters History never hurries. She has all the time there is.

Few men had a livelier realization of these things than Mr. Wilson. Few have learned by experience as bitter as his how tawdry a thing is popular adulation.

From the personal standpoint, if from no other, events fully justified one steadfast guiding policy that signally influenced the last dozen years of Mr. Wilson's public life. Acquainted with the fallibility of contemporary judgment, he paid small heed to it. He deliberately waived his right to a preliminary hearing, as it were, and allowed his acts and policies and lofty projects to go over for final judgment before the court of posterity. He would be a rash prophet, indeed, who asserted with any pretense of authority that the verdict of the future will diminish Mr. Wilson's fame rather than add to it.

And yet there are certain things we know already. We know that Mr. Wilson touched the conscience of a self-seeking world. He set up certain new standards of national morality and of international justice. He attempted more than he or any other man could accomplish; but we cannot say that he failed utterly in his great undertakings. A frail but gallant figure, the most tragic statesman of our time, he was dashed hither and yon in the seething tide-rips of international and party strife.

Mr. Wilson failed to get the assent of a majority of his countrymen to those courses of action he believed would most firmly establish the principles for which he was working. And yet this does not mean that he left our national consciousness as he found it. Nothing could be further from the truth. He wrote in the hearts of all, friends and foes alike, memorandums of certain great conceptions, sound fragments for the drafting of a code of international morals, a lofty system of live and let live.

It is idle to speculate upon what greater thing Mr. Wilson might have accomplished for the world if he had possessed that excessively rare power to make over his own temperament and root out every element of potential weakness, every tendency that might stunt the development of his plans. Strong men have strong qualities, with all the defects that lie in those qualities. The sum of these qualities is the man himself. They can no more be separated from him than can the long inheritance of which they are part and parcel.

No one will deny that Mr. Wilson gave the world the best he had. We know that he had high intentions, a noble and dauntless courage and an unquenchable love for his fellow men of all nations and languages.