

President Coolidge and Edward McLean

RECENTLY Senator Harrison of Mississippi criticized President Coolidge for continuing to consult and correspond intimately with a man like Edward McLean after the latter was more than suspected of having deliberately deceived a committee of the Senate about facts of great public importance. Later during the same session Senator Lodge accused Mr. Harrison of gross impropriety for his criticism of Mr. Coolidge's relation to Mr. McLean. "I think," he said, "it is little short of an outrage to bring the President's name into this matter as some have attempted to do today." "He is entitled to consideration in debate. It is important not to impair the faith of the people in high officials. Such a procedure lowers the character of the Senate in the opinion of the people." "The President should be lifted above rumor and the whisper of the corridor."

Many of the Democratic Senators replied to Mr. Lodge, but for the most part they confined themselves to insisting that President Coolidge was receiving a much fairer treatment at the hands of his political opponents than had the late Mr. Wilson. The retort was obvious and apt, but it ignored the merits of Mr. Lodge's contention. Is it an "outrage" to criticize a president for behaving as the record indicates Mr. Coolidge has behaved with respect to Mr. McLean?

Surely the sound answer to this question is a sharp and emphatic negative. On the contrary if the Democrats in and out of the Senate had not criticized the President for the dubious aspects of the relation between McLean and the White House and for the President's apparent lack of candor in explaining what the relationship was, they would have conspired with the Republicans to conceal from the American public information which it was entitled to possess. Criticism of even the highest public officers is justified in so far as it sheds some additional light upon the acts of government which the public is not likely to understand without interpretation.

Considered from this point of view the "attacks" of the Democratic senators, with the exception of Senator Heflin, have served a clear and a desirable public service. They have directed public attention to the dubious aspects of Mr. Coolidge's behavior. The Chairman of the Republican National Committee and its official organ of publicity have exhibited far more partisanship, intemperance and recklessness in denouncing Senator Walsh and Senator Wheeler than the Democrats have in criticizing President Coolidge.

The President's behavior, since the evidence of fraud in the oil leases was first produced, has not been above suspicion or above criticism. No fair-

minded person suspects him, of course, of being directly implicated in the fraudulent transactions. No fair-minded person suspects him of a share in any conspiracy to conceal from the Senate Public Lands Committee information about the frauds which would contribute to the exposure and the conviction of directly guilty individuals. But he can be reasonably suspected of a relationship with at least one of the guilty individuals which was, under the circumstances, improper. Nor is this all. Since the evidence of that relationship came to the surface, he has done nothing or said nothing to clear up its more suspicious aspects. He is not behaving like a man who is anxious to reveal all the facts of the connection between Edward McLean and the White House. He is rather behaving as if there was something about that connection which it was advantageous for him to conceal.

Consider what the evidence of this connection is. Just about the time when the Senate investigation into the oil leases was getting warm and dangerous, the President's Private Secretary went to Florida for a vacation and during that vacation passed two weeks in daily conversation and consultation with Messrs. Fall and McLean. The account which Mr. Sleppe gave of these meetings was not, to say the least, entirely convincing. According to his testimony Messrs. Fall, McLean and himself were merely a small group of intimate friends who were forgetting for a few days their share of responsibility for the government of the nation in the sunshine of a winter resort in Florida. Mr. Sleppe did, indeed, incidentally advise his friend McLean to make a clean breast to the Senate Committee of the real facts about his relations with Fall, for Mr. Sleppe apparently had some reason to suspect McLean's attempt at deceit.

But it is difficult to believe that Sleppe in his own testimony behaved as candidly as he advised McLean to behave. During these weeks of golf and innocent conversation there was at least one occasion on which the President used McLean as a means of communication with his private secretary and when he called in McLean as a political adviser after McLean's exposure as a deliberate conspirator against the successful prosecution of an enterprise of great importance undertaken by another branch of the government.

In the meantime and thereafter McLean was pulling all his wires to prevent the investigation from being pushed any further in his direction and he was assisted in this effort by at least three members of the White House staff—a telegrapher, a door keeper and a secret service officer. One of Mr. McLean's representatives expected to accomplish something most advantageous for his chief by opening a wire direct to the White House. Another, Mr. Bennett, had an interview with the "principal" who assures him that there will be no resignations and no rocking of the boat. This

man in his testimony before the Senate Committee supplied an utterly incredible account of the meaning of this telegram. A few days later after the President had declared, on the anniversary of Lincoln's birthday, that he considered an accused man innocent until he is proved criminally guilty, Mr. McLean felicitated him on his public spirited attitude and elicited from the President a cordial and a friendly reply.

There are many facts in this record which demand explanation and which the President does not and apparently will not explain. They indicate the existence in Mr. Coolidge's personal staff of a number of employees who were solicitous to protect a man who had fallen back to lies in order to conceal from the government of the United States facts of immense public importance. They disclose an intimacy between the offender and the President's Private Secretary which indicate that the wire into the White House might have reached as far as the President's ante-room. Finally they indicate on Mr. Coolidge's part a callousness to McLean's published moral unreliability which is profoundly disquieting. If the President had shared the general indignation and repulsion which the exposures aroused, he could not have remained on such terms of friendly intimacy with one of the chief culprits.

In view of the undisputed facts of the relation between Mr. McLean and the White House and Mr. Coolidge's refusal to clear up the ambiguous facts, one inference seems forced upon both his friends and opponents. The connection which existed between Mr. McLean and the White House from March 4, 1921 until January, 1924, includes circumstances which, if divulged now, would have political consequences which would be damaging to the President and to the Republican party. The President is struggling to avoid the disclosure of these facts, and this struggle explains the equivocations, the hesitations and the furtiveness of his behavior with respect to some aspects of the oil scandals. It explains why he did not act promptly and decisively with respect to Denby and Daugherty. It explains why he has never publicly recognized the existence of any guilt with respect to the oil scandal except the kind of guilt which, if proved, would bring with it criminal prosecution. It explains why he has never aroused American public opinion by a vivid appeal for a vigorous and exhaustive investigation and the complete exposure of all the facts which explain how and why the fraudulent leases were signed. It explains why Senator Walsh has never received help in his inquiries from any of the intelligence bureaus in the executive departments. The President behaves as if he wished to conceal from the public information which, while it might not help the government prosecutors in convicting Fall or Doheny, would help the American people to fix responsibility for a gross betrayal of their confidence.

He is receiving powerful backing in his attempt to prevent the American public from learning facts which would be damaging to his own candidacy and his party. The newspapers are singularly reticent. Of course they print reports of what the witnesses say and they describe the disclosures as "sensational," but they are far from making any sensational use of it. In their editorial comments they rarely analyze the doubtful testimony for the benefit of their readers and point out its discrepancies, its suspicious aspects and its obvious mystifications. They allow the public to make its own analysis, knowing full well how few readers of a daily paper possess the necessary time, patience and acumen to distinguish what is probably true from what is probably false in the evidence. The more conservative papers are occupied chiefly in accusing people who take the political aspects of the investigation seriously of "hysteria." They themselves, when they are not afflicted by this "hysteria," set an example to their fellow countrymen not merely of elevated calm but noble indifference. They are too superior to be suspicious. They are too public-spirited to be critical. They are too loyal to be inquisitive. In assuming this attitude they do not stand alone. They reflect perfectly the state of mind of those citizens both Democratic and Republican who consider Secretary Mellon to be the consummate American statesman and the election of President Coolidge, the man who stands behind Mr. Mellon, as indispensable to the welfare of the Republic.

The plain people of the United States should not have any illusions about the meaning of this attempt to limit the investigation and to confuse the demand for the disclosure of all pertinent information about the origin of the frauds with reckless and obscene scandal-mongering. The gentlemen who themselves are so nobly discreet and so patriotically unsuspicious and who accuse their more inquisitive fellow-countrymen of being hysterical are prompted chiefly by one object. They hope to prevent the revelation to the American voter of the information which he needs in order to reach a sound estimate of the amount of indirect responsibility for the oil scandals which attaches to the Harding administration and its accommodating attitude towards business. They hope to use the office of President as a sanctuary in which to conceal ugly facts which, if divulged, would throw too much light upon the ways and means of a Republican administration. If these people do what they wish, they will injure something far more necessary to the vitality of American government than the prestige of the presidential office. They will deprive public opinion of confidence in the sources from which its information is supposed to come. They will prevent public opinion from obtaining access to those facts which are necessary to passing a discriminating judgment on the conduct of its public officials. They will in

fact provoke the hysteria which they pretend to deprecate. A public opinion that is uninformed, mis-informed, uneasy and suspicious is almost certain to act intemperately, hastily and destructively. It is only a public which has reason to believe that it is not being deceived which can afford to be patient, tolerant, discriminating and composed.

Peace without Victory in the Coal Industry

ONLY a few months ago the outlook for peace in the bituminous coal industry was dark indeed. Well informed observers were generally predicting another strike in April. But contrary to all forecasts, the joint conference of operators and union closed a few weeks ago with an agreement which, barring a crisis, assures industrial peace in the unionized coal industry for the next three years. This settlement has consequences and a meaning which are important outside, as well as within, the coal industry.

Wages, according to the new contract, remain where they were. The fixing of wage rates for so long a period in a basic industry is a significant sign of the times. Less than three years have elapsed since the depression of 1921 and the vigorous, but in the main unsuccessful, attempts during it to liquidate wages and to establish a new and radically lower price level than then prevailed. These attempts were marked generally by failure. Leadership in the movement to resist them was more than once furnished by the United Mine Workers. Now a wage contract which has the effect of maintaining wage rates at their war level until the spring of 1927 is received with scant comment and certainly with little excitement. When the economic history of this period comes to be written, nothing should deserve more attention and closer analysis than the results of the wage policy of organized labor in the post-war period.

This contract was negotiated, moreover, in an industry in which there is a large and powerful group of non-union operators and where the union employers themselves have proved, in the past, their capacity for carrying on a long and stubborn fight. Yet agreement came easily and swiftly; the only radical change in the program of the union consisted in the reduction of the term of the contract from four to three years. If the reports of the newspapers may be trusted on this phase of the conference, the promptness with which the coal operators accepted the terms of the union was due to pressure from the federal administration. With the election of President Harding, it was generally believed in the country that the official attitude toward organized labor had changed and that justice would be meted out, as between employer and employee, with a stronger hand than

was used during the Wilson administration. Early acts of Harding in fact confirmed this view. The trade unions, however, showed considerable vitality and a more tolerant, if not friendlier, attitude was forced upon the administration. That President Coolidge, with his Boston record behind him, should even indirectly connive at a settlement with the powerful union of miners is not alone an indication that nomination and election for the presidency are near. It is simply another evidence that the status of trade unions in this country has changed radically since 1914. There is now every sign that they have, in the past ten years, come to be regarded as permanent institutions, whose views and policies must be given prompt and effective consideration.

Within the soft coal industry the present settlement represents a complete change of front from the position which the operators adopted during the last great strike in the industry. At that time, both in private and public discussion, every conceivable effort was exerted to destroy the prevailing system of national collective bargaining, whereby arrangements in the central competitive fields became ruling throughout the industry. The costliness and unfairness of this system was then the subject of discussion in almost all organs of public opinion and the views of the operators won a friendly hearing in many quarters. Only the victory of the miners' union prevented the overthrow of this centralized system of collective bargaining, which, more than any other factor, is responsible for what little order the industry can show in its industrial relations. This year the central competitive field is restored to its position of importance, without excitement and with little public discussion. Something like national collective bargaining again rules in the bituminous industry.

The effects of this successful settlement will undoubtedly be to allow the major portion of the industry three years, free from costly disturbances, and to reinforce the prestige of the United Mine Workers. So far as these ends are achieved, the agreement should turn out to be a wise and useful one. It does not, however, except very indirectly, affect those enduring problems of the industry, which are now universally conceded to be fundamental to its peaceful and efficient conduct. The assumption that over-expansion, the utilization of excess capacity, and over-manning can be remedied by the maintenance of a high level of wage rates is not supported by the experience of the past. Control, to strike at such evils, must be direct and relevant. Aside from the fact that no one knows whether the present level of wages in the coal industry will be high or low one, two, or three years from now, it is the general experience in organized industries that wage policy has little influence in the long run in weeding out the inefficient and high cost enterprises. The soft coal industry will be operated at its appropriate and economical capa--