A Closetful of Skeletons

An Analysis from The Review of the News, February 14, 1968.

The astute American voter marching down Memory Lane in an election year might do well to re-encounter the revealing and sad case of Tyler Kent. A study of it will be most rewarding as it exposes a whole closetful of political skeletons, dulls the lustre of bureaucrats on both sides of the Atlantic, and affords political cynics a holiday.

The case broke in May of 1940. Franklin D. Roosevelt was maneuvering like mad for his third term in the White House. Winston Churchill had just become Prime Minister of the British Empire. The Nazi blitzkrieg had taken out Poland and the Low Countries, and the ignominy of Dunkirk was pending. The Ambassador of the United States to the Court of St. James was the Boston Irishman, Joseph P. Kennedy.

At this time Tyler Kent, a code clerk in the American Embassy, was arrested by the British authorities with the permission (or instigation) of Ambassador Kennedy for alleged transmission of information to the enemy. This, doubtless, on instructions from the U.S. State Department: that is to say, President Roosevelt. Of course, by permitting such action Ambassador Kennedy violated the treaty protocol between the United States and Britain requiring that any accredited member of the foreign services of either nation has “diplomatic immunity” and is answerable only to the courts of justice of his own nation.

Something very strange was happening. Tyler Kent, who had served brilliantly in his post, had during his period in Moscow been reproved by the Soviet NKVD for his criticism of Stalinist methods and Communism in general. His ancestors had fought in every American war. This fiercely patriotic young man was permitted to be sentenced to seven years hard labor in British prisons. Later the State Department claimed that Kennedy first dismissed Tyler Kent and that thereby the latter lost his rights as an American citizen. Of course, not only was such summary discharge impermissible under State Department rules, but no U.S. citizen can thus be legally deprived of his citizenship.

Of course, Tyler Kent could not have been guilty of transmitting any information to the “enemy” because at the time the United States had no official enemy and was to remain “neutral” until war was declared on Japan 18 months later, after the Japanese were provoked into attacking Pearl Harbor. The smearbund insinuated that it was the Russians to whom Kent transmitted the information; but, although the Soviet Union had a non-aggression treaty with Nazi Germany, Russia was “neutral” and technically at peace with all countries except Poland and Finland. More important, Kent was rigidly anti-Communist.

Tyler Kent was confined for six months before he was tried in November, 1940. Then, contrary to Anglo-Saxon practice, the trial was held in secret. Kent was represented by the English solicitor, F. Graham Maw and the English barrister Maurice Healy, but notably not by the solicitor of the U.S. Embassy, part of whose duties is to intervene for and represent American citizens fallen afoul of the law.

In the meantime, the sainted Winston Churchill had during his first week as Prime Minister juggled 600 prominent British subjects, even including one member of Parliament (an acid critic; Captain Archibald Ramsay). Captain Ramsay’s arrest was protested by numerous Members of Parliament as a violation of their rights under the Magna Charta; but then, Churchill (like Roosevelt) was never a stickler for legality. Ramsay and the others were juggled by the great mouthpiece of Anglo-Saxondom; and Tyler Kent, albeit an American, went with them to the hoosegow.

Later, F. Graham Maw, Kent’s British solicitor, was able to require the prosecution to drop the original charge, changing it to “larceny of confidential documents”. Solicitor Maw held that “the verdict was one of expediency and under outside instruction”.

Be that as it may, Kent was sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment at Wandsworth gaol—not as a political prisoner, you understand, but cooped up with common criminals. He went on a hunger strike which ended in hospital confinement. Apparently somewhat contrite, Ambassador Kennedy sent an Embassy staff members to visit the hunger striker (who had “lost” his citizenship, remember), and shortly afterward Kent was transferred to an old monastery on the Isle of Wight. Overnight, now, he had ceased being a common thief and became a political prisoner again, although the charge of transmitting documents to an enemy had been dropped. There were 120 of Churchill’s other political prisoners there, including Ramsay and Admiral Domville, a retired British naval officer, and other prominent anti-Churchillites.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Ann H. P. Kent, Tyler’s widowed mother, was busy making inquiries. She lived in Washington, D.C. Her deceased husband had been a veteran of the Spanish-American War, had served 20 years in the U.S. Consular Service, and she drew a War Department pension.

Mrs. Kent learned that Ambassador Joseph Kennedy had almost immediately regretted his impropriety in turning Tyler over to the British Lion, but had nevertheless sent two U.S. Embassy secretaries (one of them Rudolf Schoenfeld) to give supposititious testimony against him in the British court. Later Tyler Kent told a friend who visited him in prison...
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FROM WEEK TO WEEK
The Sunday Express, February 11, 1968 concludes
its editorial with the paragraph: "The Government's policy
does not even begin to make sense."

This simple theme is that on which probably the majority of
the political commentators who make their living by
marketing their opinions base their complex but on the
whole discordant variations. But perhaps the discordancy
arises from a flaw in the theme, and the real question is: in
what context does the Government's policy make sense?
For nobody ever seems to accuse Mr. Wilson and several of
his colleagues of any failure in intellect or ability; rather
the reverse.

Mr. Wilson, most of his colleagues, his promoters and
his (mostly concealed) backers, are Socialists. To the true
Socialist, whether of the Communist or Fabian variety
Socialism is Internationalism, of which the main component is
the destruction of nationalism and the emergence of
world government.

If Mr. Wilson were to address the British nation and
say: "The measures being taken by my Government are des-
digned to fit this country into a world-wide system of govern-
ment, and this necessarily requires the transfer of national
sovereignty in all its forms to international institutions, and the
merging of all forms of economic activity under more and
more centralised direction under the control of overseas
capital, etc." he might have some justifiable fears for his
own safety, if he hasn't already. But by creating the con-
ditions of recurring economic crisis, the objectives of Soc-
ialism can be achieved under the aspect of emergency.
Thus Mr. Richard Crossman was exulting, not dissimulating,
when he pronounced devaluation and the exodus from the
East as "giant strides towards Socialism".

In real terms—i.e., in ability to produce the goods and
services required by its own people—Britain is ever more
wealthy. The physical limitation imposed on this ability is
the necessity to import the raw materials other than the
imports required for exports. This is a problem which could
easily have been dealt with within the confines of the
English-speaking Commonwealth—so long as Britain main-
tained the military sanctions to enable her to mind her own
business. Since the premise of international Socialism is that
nations should have their business managed for them by in-
national Authorities, the disarming of Britain and the
international cartelisation of her industry make entire sense.
And since this process goes against the grain of the Anglo-
Saxon character, the destruction of the latter by mongrelisa-
tion, subversion, and mis-education is equally to be expected.

The true but unspoken slogan of Socialism is "all pro-
etarians are equal": factory-fodder.

The people with their fingers on the triggers of the
atomic bombs and missiles are those who have far and away
the most to lose if the bombs go off. This fact exposes the
hideous reality of the war in Vietnam. A fraction of the
fire-power unleashed by the U.S. in Vietnam, if directed to the
target centre of Viet Cong control would terminate
the war in very short order. But in fact the U.S. is sup-
plying Russia which is supplying North Vietnam, thus keeping
the war going. The object, of course, is to 'defeat' the U.S.
without damaging its industrial equipment, which is what
the Communists are after. As a result of the 'escalation'
of the war, the U.S. is very seriously depleted not of gross
man-power, but of key personnel such as pilots and tech-
nicians in various critical fields, and therefore is in no condi-
tion to police or protect the rest of the 'free' world. In
this situation, Europe is probably vulnerable to mere ulti-
matum; and following Europe, the U.S. itself.

All the ingredients of catastrophe appear now to be
fused, probably to be detonated by a universal economic
'crisis' ('collapse' of the dollar). In contemplating the mess,
remember that many of the top Communists or call them
what you will are, perhaps temporarily, resident in the U.S.
omission, slant, innuendo—or even a tone of voice—news is far from objectively presented ... Why ... have religious programmes been progressively drained of specifically religious content? ... Such subjects as abortion and homosexuality were hammered at by the B.B.C. far beyond what their importance justified ... In the same way, drug-taking became the staple fare of discussion and enquiry programmes to the point where a minority problem was boosted into something like incitement. A constant stream of plays and documentaries presented life as both sordid and sexually loose, marriage and family life as ludicrously old hat, and religion as beneath consideration.” And Mr. Young

The caption to Mr. Young's article remarks that B.B.C. programmes—TV and radio—“seem intended to undermine Britain and the standards of the people”; and Mr. Young writes: “Oddly enough, what they are doing at the B.B.C. is exactly what Communism would like to do.”

Guest of Honour? Well, there is said to be honour among thieves, who no doubt would unanimously agree as to the immorality of birds of a feather flocking together. Perhaps when the mixed flock of Communists have exterminated the Vietnamese, they will turn their attention to the sparrows, swans, and birds of Paradise.

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When arrested, Tyler was held incommunicado. The only American observer at Kent's secret trial was Consul General George G. Erhardt, who had known Tyler since the latter's boyhood. He was, nonetheless, placed under oath not to disclose any of the details of the hearing. Returning to the United States, Mr. Erhardt told Mrs. Kent: “Tyler did nothing reprehensible . . .” Mrs. Kent saw Ambassador Kennedy after his resignation from his London post, and asked him if her son had been rightly accused of being a spy. He replied that there was no basis whatever for that suspicion. Walter Trohan, famed Chicago Tribune reporter, stated that Kennedy told him: “I am very ashamed of the part I played in the Kent Case—I lost my head.”

It was not until May of 1941 when President Roosevelt was hell-bent for war and surreptitiously aiding the British that Tyler Kent's mother learned that there had been secret cables in code between Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt which Tyler Kent had had to decode in the course of his duties. These cables, she learned from Robert Scott, a newsman formerly of the Washington Post and later of the Pittsburgh Gazette, dealt with the conduct of the war, plans for Anglo-American cooperation, and specifically with the Lend-Lease formula. In them Roosevelt had been promised the full support of British propaganda sources in his third-term election campaign, in which he promised the mothers and fathers of America that he would never send their sons abroad to a foreign war—unless attacked. He would move to Britain's support, he promised in the cables, as soon as Churchill superseded Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain at 10 Downing Street.

Chamberlain at 10 Downing Street.

Churchill was at the time First Lord of the Admiralty and had no powers to communicate with any head of a foreign state about foreign policy. In fact, Churchill had seriously violated British law and for that deserved to be canned—if the facts were known. Roosevelt, of course, had violated the Constitution of the United States, and revelation of the secret wires would have blown him to Campbello.

At the behest of Mrs. Kent, a young public relations expert named Otis T. Wingo, a classmate of Tyler Kent, interested himself in the case. From two officials of the British Embassy in Washington, in July 1941, Mr. Wingo learned that the controversial cables were coded and decoded on Ambassador Kennedy's instructions. As the two British officials in Washington put it: “We did not want to try this case, but since his own Government and Ambassador insisted, there was nothing else to do . . . His mother has been to see us and we hope she is satisfied, because publicity in this matter would be most embarrassing to both Governments.”

When Tyler Kent first learned of the direction of the correspondence between Churchill and Roosevelt, he had tried to resign but Ambassador Kennedy would not accept it. The Ambassador did not dare chance letting Kent out of his sight. So the patriotic Tyler Kent, outraged by the mare's nest of intrigue, subversion and treason he was uncovering, kept copies of all these cables in his room, apparently planning to send them to those in the States who might save America from World War II. Now, alas, the British had him—and the cables.

On November 11, 1941, a short month before the Pearl Harbor “day that will live in infamy”, some 664 questions were put in the House of Commons. Richard M. Stokes, Labor M.P., asked whether or not a British subject who sent telegrams to President Roosevelt, using the U.S. Embassy code, had thereby evaded the British censorship, and whether or not the guilty person had been prosecuted. Independent Laborite John C. McGovern asked: “Cannot the Home Secretary say whether any of these cablegrams or messages were sent by the Prime Minister (Churchill) behind the back of the then Prime Minister (Neville Chamberlain)?” The Home Secretary, the distinguished Laborite Herbert Morrison, smugly replied on the floor of the House of Commons: “No information can be properly given out about confidential documents which are extracted from the American Embassy.”

Doxology!

American editors stopped the ball, but for most of them it was a grounder too hot to handle. A few weeks after the extended-British debate, Oliver Lyttleton, Minister of War Production in the British Cabinet, revealed in a speech that Roosevelt had purposefully provoked the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. When Roosevelt's “Charlie McCarthy”, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, challenged Lyttleton's charge, the Britisher tempered his statement but did not change its sense. Later Eleanor confessed that everybody in the White House expected the attack, and historian Charles C. Tansill established the proof of the charges in his scholarly Back Door to War.

Tyler Kent’s friends suggested that the Russian Secret
Service procured the Churchill-Roosevelt cables either photostatically or textually by entering his room during his absence. The Bolsheis were watching the vigorously anti-Communist Kent anyway. They might also have procured the text of the cables in the English courtroom where, on demand of the barrister, they were exhibited. However the Stalinists got them is immaterial. Colonel A. O. McGuire of Washington, D.C., substantiated the possession. It was pointed out that this put the Soviet Government in a position to use the improper interchange between Churchill and Roosevelt in such manner and such time as best suited Kremli policies. It has been said that Stalin did use them at Teheran to blackmail concessions out of Roosevelt and Churchill.

In the summer of 1941, Mrs. Kent had sought in vain to get a passport out of the State Department to visit England. She then got a Baltimore newsman, Ian Ross MacFarlane, to go to England for her, at her expense, interview Mr. Maw, the British solicitor and, if possible, see Tyler Kent in confinement on the Isle of Wight.

MacFarlane made the trip in March of 1942 and accomplished both assignments. Kent told him that the task of handling the surreptitious cables preyed on his mind and conscience. The Foreign Service oath is: "I do solemnly swear or affirm that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, etc." Kent considered his assignment a violation of this oath, since he was charged at the time with preserving the neutrality of the United States. It was then that he asked for a transfer to a post where he could uphold the law and his oath. Kennedy refused, and then Kent divulged the cables to Churchill's most active political opponent in Parliament, the leader of the Right Club, Captain Archibald Ramsay—hardly "the enemy".

The exchange of cables began in October of 1939. The first cable from Churchill read in a sense: "I am half American and the natural person to work with you. We evidently see eye to eye. If I could become Prime Minister of Britain we could control the world." After a few weeks, Franklin grabbed the bait, and thenceforward the rate of exchange accelerated.

Otis T. Wingo says he was told by John Cowles, publisher of the Des Moines Register and Tribune, that Wendell Willkie came to him after luncheon with Churchill one day and said: "I have a good story, but it is strictly off the record and by no means for publication. Mr. Churchill has just told me that long before Congress heard of it, he and the President had arranged a Lend-Lease Agreement." Then Willkie added: "If you do publish it I will kill it at once by denying it."

An interesting sidelight on the Tyler Kent Case was the death on January 2, 1944 under mysterious circumstances of John Bryant Owen, usually known as John Bryan, grandson of William Jennings Bryan and son of our former Minister to Denmark, Ruth Bryan Owen. He had returned to America with Ian Ross MacFarlane in September, 1942, landing in Newfoundland and continuing to New York by boat.

Bryan's grandson had interested himself strongly in the Kent Case, familiarized himself with the position of the Right Club headed by Captain Ramsay, and had strongly criticized both the British and American Governments. Owen was released from a six-month prison sentence in London just at the time MacFarlane was leaving and was expelled with only ten shillings to his name. It was Mrs. Kent's money, furnished by MacFarlane, that enabled him to take passage home. When the New York police found John Bryant Owen dead, MacFarlane dissociated himself from the case, or even mention of it, because he feared for the personal safety of Tyler Kent.

The fear was not groundless. Mr. Maw had applied for a cancellation of the deportation order which had stood over Kent's head since his imprisonment. The solicitor expressed his belief that it would be unwise for Kent, for reasons of bodily safety, to re-enter American jurisdiction or leave British jurisdiction until the U.S. Government became more friendly to him.

On June 15, 1944, debate broke out in the House of Commons concerning the right of the Government to hold one of its members, Captain Ramsay, four years without trial. Labor, Liberal and Conservative M.P.'s participated. Soon the dam broke in Washington—in both the House and the Senate. Senators Henrik Shipstead, Tom (Tom-Tom) Connally, Burton K. Wheeler and other solons harried the Administration through several pages of the Congressional Record of June 19, 1944. The State Department, eager to hush up the scandal, sent a special man to try to mollify Senator Wheeler. It was pointed out in the Senate floor that if, indeed, any papers had been stolen, it was a violation of American, not British, law; and that if anybody were arrested it should have been Churchill for secretly sending cables without passing them through censorship in wartime—cables which went behind the back of the British Government, and in essence conspired for the downfall of that Government.

Roosevelt, of course, "never said a mumblin' word"; nor did Governor Thomas Dewey of New York who was Republican candidate for President in 1944. As a final effort on behalf of her son, Mrs. Ann H. P. Kent sent a résumé of his case to the Democratic and Republican Conventions in June and July of 1944. Upton Close, the radio commentator, gave it nationwide disclosure. Big newspapers now featured it. The debate became so hot that even ex-Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy rushed to the defense of the New Deal—without, of course, acknowledging the nature of the controversial cables.

Tyler Kent was finally released from prison after World War II was over. He returned to this country, married, and never since has spoken of the matter of the cables. Some explain his silence by the fact that the New Deal had cannily tacked on a rider to an innocuous bill providing a penalty of ten years' imprisonment for divulging such "secret information".

—GEORGE S. SCHUYLER

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