

SECRET DIPLOMACY IN A DEMOCRACY: SIR EDWARD GREY

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Secret diplomacy is generally considered one of the fundamental causes of the World War. President Wilson in his famous address to Congress on January 8, 1918, gave full recognition to its significance. The first point of his "Fourteen Points," which was a part of Wilson's address, reads: "Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind, but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view." This same principle, and, incidentally, the same fear and distrust of secret diplomacy, is found in the Covenant of the League of Nations. Article XVIII of the Covenant states:

"Every treaty or international engagement entered into hereafter by any Member of the League shall be forthwith registered with the Secretariat and shall as soon as possible be published by it. No such treaty or international engagement shall be binding until so registered."

The noble principle of open diplomacy has, of course, seldom been realized, but it remains as important today as it was yesterday. No one can seriously deny the fact that if all the cards had been laid on the green table for the people of England and Germany, of France and the United States to study and to evaluate, the decisions of the people might have been different than the decisions of their respective governments. Neither can there be any question, with the world evidently dividing into antagonistic political theories, that at least the peoples fortunate enough to live in a liberal-democracy deserve to know whither they are going and what is going on behind the scenes.

This does not imply, nor is it meant to suggest, that the people of a state are necessarily less warlike than their government. Diplomacy of any type is necessarily a bargaining device in which each side attempts to attain the maximum advantage. When negotiations are conducted openly and irreconcilable claims are advanced, a matter of minor significance may assume dangerous proportions. Drunk with power and blinded with patriotic fervor, a people are not going to listen to reason. It is a notorious truism that the ethics of individuals are lowered when subjected to mass psychosis. On the other hand, while secret diplomacy often permits intelligent men to solve international differences in a successful and intelligent manner, it has very definite dangers of its own.

Democracy and secret diplomacy are fundamentally incompatible. This point can, perhaps, be illustrated by a brief survey of British foreign policy before the outbreak of the World War. From 1905 to 1916 Sir Edward Grey was minister for foreign affairs. During this period Grey tried to carry on the foreign policy which he had inherited from his predecessor, Lord Lansdowne. This policy consisted primarily of three diplomatic agreements: first, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902; second, the Entente Cordiale of 1904; and third, a rapprochement with Russia which finally led to the Anglo-Russian convention of 1907. All of these agreements were, at least partially, known to the English public or to the Cabinet members.

Sir Edward Grey, however, by an original interpretation of these agreements, and by secret commitments actually changed the obligations of the British people. Within six weeks after heading office, he secretly gave per-

mission for military and naval conversations between French and British officers. The British people, whom he served, and his colleagues in the Cabinet, with the exception of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of War, were not informed. Although Grey was personally honest, he thereby started a series of obligations and honorable commitments which could only be liquidated by war. Time and again when Grey was questioned regarding his policies, he either avoided a direct answer, clouded the issue with the camouflage of words, or denied an allegation, which, if it was not a lie, had no relation to truth.

In conclusion, it should be noted that if the British people had known all the facts in the case, they may or may not have supported the declaration of war. The significant point is that they were misled by secret diplomacy and that they were asked to make good a check drawn on the bank of war. Do the people of a democracy deserve to know where their foreign office is leading them? Are "open covenants, openly arrived at," more dangerous than diplomacy?