

The buying of a president

By ARTHUR HOPPE
Columnist

Well, there goes Franco-American friendship. It's the fault of our rotten system of selling ambassadorships. The whole thing's a scandal to the jaybirds.

A list of the big donors in the 1968 campaign has just been published. It shows that Arthur K. Watson, who gave \$49,000 to the Republican cause, was appointed our Ambassador to France by Mr. Nixon, while Guilford Dudley, Jr. who

donated \$52,000 to the same cause, was named our Ambassador to Denmark.

You can imagine how the French felt on learning we'd sent them a cut-rate Ambassador who was \$3,000 cheaper than the one we sent

the Danes. It's a good thing General De Gaulle didn't live to see the day.

Our only defense is to confess the sad and incredible truth: when it comes to selling high Government positions to big campaign con-

tributors, the Nixon Administration, like all previous Administrations, is unbelievably disorganized.

Selling ambassadorships is, of course, a cherished American heritage -- cherished particularly by all Presidential candidates. Nor can the results necessarily be faulted. For all we know, Mr. Watson may even be able to speak French and Mr. Dudley might possibly be fluent in Danish. Or vice versa.

What is scandalous is the total lack of organization in this otherwise businesslike system.

It may shock you to learn, for example, that no Presidential candidate over the years has ever compiled a job opportunities list -- one that clearly states exactly what ambassadorships are being offered for sale and precisely what they cost.

A fixed price would seem rudimentary. The dignity of the office precludes haggling between a potential Ambassador and a potential President. But there's no reason discreet notices couldn't be placed in the help wanted columns to stimulate inquiries:

"Ambass. to Mbonga open. Good sal. Palatial res., limousine, flags and staff provided. Prestige guaranteed. Investment required: \$65,500."

But the haphazard way it is now, a contributor donates \$65,500 and, if his candidate wins, writes: "Dear Mr. President: Congratulations! I hope my \$65,500 helped in some small way. As I mentioned, I've long been interested in Mbonga and its importance to Mbongan-American relations."

So he gets the job and discovers our new Ambassador to the Riviera coughed up only \$47,300. Think of the ill will and the back-biting. No wonder our foreign policy is in such a mess.

Moreover, in these days of rising campaign costs, desperate candidates are losing millions through the present disorderly system.

For one thing, they tend to sell only ambassadorships. But if it's acceptable to sell ambassadorships, why on earth can't they sell the thousands of other high Government jobs available to any new Administration?

Surely the Secretary of State carries ten times the prestige of an Ambassador. I don't know what, if anything, Mr. William P. Rogers contributed to Mr. Nixon's campaign. But if he got that Cabinet post for less than half a million, he got it for a steal.

The system, then, must be put on a businesslike basis. In these perilous times when wars can break out anywhere we simply can't afford cut-rate diplomats in our first line of defense.

In our democracy, we are entitled to the very best men to represent us at home and abroad -- and the most organized and businesslike President their money can buy. (Copyright Chronicle Co. 1971)



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