

By Drew Pearson

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The Washington Merry-Go-Round

On Payola and Gifts to Officials

By Drew Pearson

Three incidents occurred in different parts of the country recently, all bearing on the subject of what has been dubbed "payola."

In Chicago, it was learned that veteran disc jockey Al Benson received \$855 a month from record companies which wanted their music played



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over the air. He denied this was payola. "I won't hide behind the Fifth Amendment," he said. "What I am doing is perfectly legitimate."

In Washington, charming Mamie Eisenhower, attending a luncheon given by Cabinet wives, wore two beautiful clips of jewels given her by the Brazilian government with earrings and bracelet to match. "They were given to me when Ike was Chief of Staff and we visited Latin America," she explained quite frankly.

In Hyde Park, a visitor going through the Roosevelt Library, which now belongs to the U. S. Government, noted an aquamarine given Mrs. Roosevelt by President Vargas of Brazil which she in turn had given the U. S. Government.

Nobody really believes that the beautiful Brazilian jewels given Mrs. Eisenhower influ-

enced American policy toward Brazil; nor that the heavy gold mesh bag which Emperor Haile Selassie gave her more recently influenced U. S. policy toward Ethiopia; nor that the very expensive necklace presented her by King Saud of Saudi Arabia has swayed policy toward his country.

Nevertheless, when King Saud gave expensive jewelry to Mrs. Eugene Black, wife of the head of the World Bank, Mr. Black had it appraised, found that it was worth around \$12,000, and politely notified the Saudi Arabian Ambassador that Mrs. Black could not accept it.

Payola and Gifts

And with the question of gifts—or payola—now under the spotlight, it's only fair to examine gifts given to those in very high places. This is one reason why the Interstate Commerce Commission has just issued a firm directive to all members that they must accept no favors on penalty of being fired.

The precedent set by the Constitution of the United States on the question of payola is, of course, quite clear. It states that no Government official can "accept any present, emolument, office, or title of any kind whatever, from any king, prince, or foreign state."

The founding fathers considered this so important that they put it in the very first article of the Constitution. And in the Teddy Roosevelt

Administration it was followed so carefully that Attorney General Henry M. Hoyt ruled that not even photographs could be accepted by naval officers from Prince Henry of Prussia, though he was not a ruling prince.

And during Franklin D. Roosevelt's Administration I remember Missy LeHand telling me how she sent stamp collections received from foreign governments over to the State Department immediately, before FDR could see them; otherwise he might have latched on to them. FDR loved stamps.

In recent years, high officials have taken a much more lackadaisical view of the Constitution, just as disc jockeys have taken a lackadaisical view of payola. John Foster Dulles admitted quite frankly that he had accepted a gold watch, an embroidered robe, and a suitcase from King Saud.

The Nixons' Gifts

The Nixons also received a museum-piece rug from the Shah of Iran, a priceless Buddha head from the King of Afghanistan, a teakwood chest inlaid with mother-of-pearl from Mme. Chiang Kai-shek, and three cratesloads of gifts on the Vice President's last trip to Latin America, including a silverware set valued at \$15,000.

On the other hand, Victor Purse, a State Department protocol officer, was demoted when his wife accepted an Oldsmobile from King Saud.

Gifts from foreign governments are clearly against the law, even if largely winked at of late.

However, the law does not specifically cover domestic gifts, and every President receives a wide assortment of tokens ranging from turkeys and cheeses to dogs and hunting rifles. Many of these are a nuisance and are turned over to appropriate agencies of government.

However, gifts to President Eisenhower have come in unprecedented numbers and value, so that the total of more practical gifts is now estimated at around \$300,000. They include an electric kitchen for his Gettysburg farm, 48 Norway spruce, a greenhouse, a 60-foot wall and 2000 tulip and hyacinth bulbs, all sorts of valuable farm machinery, a \$3000 putting green, an electric golf cart, a \$4000 tractor, all sorts of antique furniture, and approximately 25 purebred black Angus cattle, valued at over \$1000 each.

Some of the donors, especially Texas oilmen who have been most generous, have been in a position to want important favors from the White House—such as tidelands oil, which they got. The President, commenting on these gifts, had this to say at a press conference: "I think the problem should be decided according to good taste. Of course, all within the law, but of good taste and its implications and its interpretations by others."

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