
Frameup of Radicals Laid to Lusk Probers by Resigning Aide: Official Translator Quits Post, Asserting Committee Does Not Seek Truth But Tries to Influence and Arouse Public Opinion — British Secret Service Chief Examined Papers, Is Charge.

[from June 22, 1919 press release]

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Because he finds Archibald Stevenson to be “pursuing the methods of the former Tsars of Russia,” and because he finds that the purpose of the “investigators” is avowedly not investigation, but a determination to “bust up the whole Socialist and radical gang,” Feliciu Vexler, an instructor of languages at Columbia University, has resigned his position as official translator for the Lusk Committee.

Vexler’s resignation was written on June 13 [1919], just after he had learned of the proposed raid on the Rand School, but the public was notified of it only yesterday [June 22] through a statement sent to all of the New York newspapers.

In this statement Vexler charges that the whole affair is being guided by Stevenson and a man named Nathan, supposedly chief of the British Secret Service in this country, and that so far not one member of the committee has taken part in any of the various raids or examined any of the documents seized by Stevenson and his companions.†

Members of the raiding crew, Vexler says, told him frankly that their purpose in making the raids was not to find the truth, but to “frame up” a case against all radical groups in New York through the

public press, and to show as plausibly as possible that a coordinated movement for the “overthrow of the government” of the United States exists. All had this distinctly in mind before the “investigation” started, he says.

Raids Violate Laws.

It was after he became aware of these real intentions of Stevenson and the others that Vexler resigned. The raids, he found, were made “under the thinnest pretext of legal form” and were, in effect, “gross violations of the letter and spirit of our laws.”

Vexler says in his statement:

As one who had an unwilling part in events growing out of the raid upon the Soviet Bureau on Thursday, June 12 [1919], I wish in justice to the public and myself to make the following statement:

I have resigned my position as a translator for Mr. Stevenson because I could not do my work in connection with the raid on the Soviet Bureau with a clear conscience.

I am in no sense a sympathizer with the Soviet government. I do not believe either in its theories nor in its practices. I am not a Socialist. If God Almighty

†- Reference is to Robert Nathan, a key deputy of Norman Graham Thwaites. Thwaites was the de facto head of the British consulate’s Office of the Military Attaché and the top official in William Wiseman’s clandestine British intelligence operation in America. Nathan, a former civil servant in India, came to America late in March 1916 and remained until August 1919. Nathan’s tasks included the collection of intelligence on Indian nationalist movements functioning in America, as well as the gathering of information on Irish nationalists and sundry radicals perceived to be a threat to the continued maintenance of the British empire. [See: Richard B. Spence, “Englishmen in New York: The SIS American Station, 1915-1921,” *Intelligence and National Security*, v. 19, no. 3 (Autumn ’04), pp. 511-537.]

should come with a Soviet or other kind of constitution for the United States, I would oppose them until they were ratified by the people as prescribed by our fundamental law; but I cannot work with a group of men who use the methods of Mr. Stevenson and his associates.

In my opinion, Mr. Stevenson, and those for whom he works, are pursuing the methods of the former Tsars of Russia, the methods which created Bolshevism.

The raid on the Soviet Bureau seemed to me to be violence under the thinnest pretense of legal form. As soon as I realized what was actually going on, I handed in my resignation. Now, as I have said, my conscience is clear.

What forces are at work behind Mr. Stevenson, I do not know, but I do know one thing that will astonish every American citizen. Associated with Stevenson, and one of the few men who had access to the room to which the Soviet papers were taken, was a man by the name of Nathan. I was told by one of the raiding group that Mr. Nathan is Chief of the British Secret Service in America. Whether Nathan is back of Stevenson or Stevenson back of Nathan, I do not know.

Besides Nathan, there were only a handful of others who had access to the Soviet documents. Among them was a private detective named Gunewald, a banker by the name of Proctor, Mr. Converse, who made the affidavits in the case, and a man who goes by the name of Mr. Vanderpool. The significant thing is that so far as I know not a single member of the Lusk Committee was present when I was working over the papers. The whole thing seemed to be the private affair of Stevenson and Nathan.

These men showed in everything they said to me, and they talked to me freely, including Stevenson, that they were not engaged in seeking the truth in this so-called investigation, but on the contrary they were trying in every way to "get something on it," as the phrase goes, and to prejudge the case in the public press. They set out, as Converse said to me, to "bust the whole Socialist and radical gang." After examining the papers I remarked to Stevenson that there was nothing criminal in any of the exhibits submitted which I had examined, and on which Mr. Stevenson told me the case against the Soviet Bureau was to rest. I said they might prove a boomerang. Stevenson admitted that there was nothing among the papers found which the people raided could not explain, but it would be too late.

To me, who have come to this country because of the admiration and love for the Anglo-Saxon traditions of liberty, it seems that when a detective like Converse can get a search warrant on a piece of news admitted by him to be destined for publication,

not only the letter but the spirit of our laws has been grossly violated.

The atmosphere which I found in the room at the Prince George Hotel, where some of the papers seized had been taken, was of such a character that I felt my self-respect demanded that I should sever connections at once with the group engaged in what I considered a violation of the spirit of the Constitution of the United States, to which I had sworn allegiance and to which I have had the privilege of always remaining faithful. I did not return to the Prince George after leaving there Friday, June 13, and on Monday [June 16, 1919] wrote Mr. Stevenson that I was unable to work with him any longer.

A *Call* reporter tried to see Vexler at the address given on the statement. He then tried at Columbia University, as a slip in the statement showed that Vexler was librarian of the School of Philosophy. Vexler was not there. It was found out, however, that he was connected with the Department of Slavonic Languages in the university. The reporter remembers that there was a room in the Public Library at 42nd Street devoted to languages. When the librarian in charge was asked if he knew such a person, a slight, scholarly-looking man was pointed out to him.

Approaching Vexler, the reporter handed him a copy of the statement *The Call* had received and asked him if he would explain what he meant by the "atmosphere" in the Prince George [Hotel] headquarters of the crowd of raiders who had descended upon the Soviet Bureau.

At first Vexler objected to amplifying the statement that he said he had sent all the newspapers. He appeared very much annoyed at the idea of being mixed up in the matter. He said he regretted that he had to make any statement at all, but that he felt he must make it clear that the methods of Stevenson and his group were such as he would have nothing to do with and must expose in the interests of common decency.

Sought to Influence Public.

When pressed to answer the question as to what he meant by "atmosphere," Vexler replied that, from his conversations with Stevenson and the others it seemed to him that it was not their purpose to detect crimes against the government, but to create public opinions against the so-called radical and liberal schools

of thought in the country, and that he believed, from all the talk that he heard from Stevenson and his associates that the attack upon the Soviet Bureau was but a cloak to cover up another purpose.

When asked what he meant by “another purpose,” Vexler replied:

“I mean that it appeared to me to be an attempt to ‘frame up’ certain persons for public obloquy. In my presence Converse planned with Stevenson to raid the Rand School. This was on Friday, June 13, the last day I was connected with Stevenson. Stevenson told me it was his purpose to link together all the various radical movements in an attempt to show that a widespread conspiracy existed by which it was intended to overthrow the government.

“As an illustration of the methods pursued by Stevenson, a plan of a Russian consular system, which I had handled among the other papers seized in the raid, was to be put forward in an attempt to prove that this was really an effort to establish Soviets in the country. Stevenson said that it could be used as a link in the chain to prove that such was the intention of the Soviet government.

Legal Value Not Considered.

“The whole attitude of Stevenson and his associates was not what the legal value of the documents might be, but what their values might be in arousing suspicion or inflaming public opinion.”

Vexler refused to discuss the matter any further, saying that he thought the statement he had sent to the press covered all the matters that would interest the public. He was asked if he had had dealings with Stevenson before, and replied that he was connected with him from August 1918 to February 1919, part of

the time in the Military Intelligence Bureau. It will be remembered that it was through his work in this bureau that Stevenson compiled the famous list that aroused so much indignation and resulted in his repudiation by Secretary Baker.

Vexler informed the *Call* reporter that he had also acted during the war period as a translator for the post office and the Department of Justice, part of the time as a “dollar-a-year man.” Vexler said that he had been connected with Columbia University for the past 10 years, that he was a Romanian by birth and an American citizen by choice.

Stevenson, when asked by a *Call* reporter last night whether he knew the Nathan referred to in Vexler’s statement, intimated that he knew him vaguely.

“I have met him in the past few years around New York,” Stevenson declared. “I know who he is, I think.”

“Who is he?” he was asked.

“I don’t know. I don’t know where his office is. I have met him in the city a number of times.”

He was informed that Nathan was said to have his office in the same building as the British Provost Marshal, 44 Whitehall Street. Stevenson couldn’t recollect what the occupation of the man Nathan, whom he knew, was.

However, he emphatically denied that Nathan or the British Secret Service or Army Intelligence had any connection with the committee or the raids. He denied Vexler’s assertion that Nathan had been permitted free access to the rooms where the documents seized in the raid on the Russian Soviet Bureau were stored.

He refused to comment on Vexler’s statements. All he said, when first told of it by the *Call* reporter, was “Very good!”

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

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