

There is something about a roused woman, especially if she add to all her other strong passions, the fierce impulses of recklessness and despair, which few men like to provoke.—Oliver Twist

Resolution of the Wives' Dilemma

CARROLL RUSSELL SHERER

OUR previous post was the kind where you are either bored to death or scared to death, neither condition being conducive to peace of mind or creativity. Our main job was to survive and to do it gracefully. The technique of this complicated trick

Mrs. Sherer is the wife of a career Foreign Service officer presently serving as Ambassador to Czechoslovakia. Since 1946 they have had nine posts abroad and three Washington assignments. They are still married to each other and even living together.

could best be developed and executed by the women, a fact tacitly recognized by everyone, and they instinctively set about doing it. There was no question of charity events; we never even celebrated our national day. Our problems were real basics like how we would get enough to eat. Everyone was at one time or another genuinely frightened and the eleven o'clock curfew stuck until the end of our tour. It was the only post we have had where a Foreign Service officer

was arrested and taken off to jail in a paddy wagon with his diplomatic identity card in his pocket. We only got him back by the Ambassador's going in person to the Presidency in the middle of the night and demanding his immediate release. The courage and self-discipline exercised by the officer's wife during those trying hours were an example and a boost for all of us. None of us will forget her.

In fact, none of us will forget any of it. Although I guess there wasn't



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a single one of us who could have said he was really doing his own "thing," we were doing our mutual thing which seemed to bring out the best in each one and we were proud of that. It was a good (bad?) job well done, and someday I hope to get a decent book out of it, but even if I don't I would not trade the experience for any number of years of my own thing because *my* thing, at least, is not that interesting and I would not for a moment pretend that it is.

Now that I am back in Europe where life is easier and where I am not threatened by anything except my own inertia and stupidity, I have had time to focus on the "wives' dilemma" in the Foreign Service and have tried to inform myself of all its particulars. Many nations, of course, do not choose or cannot afford to use the wives of their diplomats in the way that most Europeans have come to view as traditional. In those cases the husband comes to the post unaccompanied by his family. He has no choice until much later on when he be-



comes that dirty word "senior." This explains why ambassadors' wives of some countries are not as likely to be skilled in survival techniques as ours are (e.g. language ability, health precautions and procedures, child-rearing abroad).

But this would be a rather harsh and un-American solution to the dilemma; people should, after all, have a choice. Having great sympa-

thy for the wife who wishes to be divorced from her husband's career but not from her husband, I am proposing a plan which could save the State Department hundreds of thousands of dollars and would satisfy the demand for independence that many wives have nowadays while at the same time giving recognition to those who wish to remain

(Continued on page 40)

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WIVES' DILEMMA

from page 8

involved. I would like to have the plan named after me because I am so fond of it.

The Plan

The Sherer Plan provides that each Foreign Service officer declare himself/herself either as an "I" (Independent) or a "D" (Dependent) before going to a new post. These initials refer to his official status in relation to his spouse at the post. The "I" category (Independent of assistance from spouse at post) will, of course, automatically include all bachelors, widowers, widows, and unmarried women officers whether or not they have children. It will also include officers whose wives prefer not to come to the post at all or to come without the burden of any responsibility toward Embassy or diplomatic life there. These officers will be eligible for a special allowance known as the "I Allowance." It will not be a substitute for a Representation Allowance but will be in addition to it. It will be

sufficient to allow the officer to hire caterers, to rent linen, cutlery, and crystal for representational events he needs to put on at home, or it may be used to supplement the Representational Allowance which is usually not adequate for entertaining in public places. The I Allowance should be a set sum, differing in each post like the Cost of Living, dependent on the officer's rank and official responsibilities outside his office. It should allow him to do an adequate job without wear and tear on his wife or her personal possessions.

By definition an "I" wife will be outside the jurisdiction of the Ambassador and exempt from duties toward the common life of the Embassy, the school, or any other community organization. Her name will not appear on the diplomatic list and she will not be required or even encouraged to attend social events in her husband's Embassy. She may take any job she likes (and is permitted to take as a foreigner by the host government), she may sign any petition, march in any parade, or

join any movement that interests her. She may, of course, expect the same protection from the Consul as any other American citizen.

"I" wives will in turn resolve their own health problems without help from United States Government facilities; they will travel on regular passports (except to a limited number of posts where they might encounter visa difficulties, they will be issued Official passports); they will, of course, pay for their own transportation. Subject to the Ambassador's approval, they may pay rent to the Embassy and live in government quarters with their husbands. The amount of this rent will be determined by the post which will consider the cost of utilities and maintenance in figuring it. These wives will not have Commissary or PX privileges in posts where these facilities exist, but there is naturally no reason why the husband cannot shop for the whole family.

An officer who wishes to declare himself "D" (Dependent on his wife for official support at the post) will

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be required to procure his wife's signature on the declaration whereas, in the case of an "I" declaration, the wife's signature will be optional. "D" wives but not "I" wives will be entitled to all of the classic benefits of the Foreign Service including pouch privileges, free entry of imported goods (as determined by the host country), language lessons paid for by the Department, briefings at the FSI, medical care, pre-paid transportation for herself and her belongings, and the rest of the list we all know about. She will in turn be responsible for her classic function. She will participate in official entertaining at the post to the extent of her knowledge and ability and she will not engage in activities which the Ambassador deems detrimental to the common mission.

This is not to say that "D" wives are prevented from taking jobs. On the contrary, they are encouraged to do so as their influence in the community will be of great benefit to the Embassy. They will not use their jobs, however, as an excuse to avoid their official tasks although

reasonable consideration should be given to working "D" wives because of their employment. Theoretically, at least, this is the system that has always been followed. (Personally, I have had full-time jobs away from home in only two posts. However, I had the feeling in both cases that my job enhanced my ability to assist the Embassy rather than the other way around.)

"D" officers will receive a new benefit, funds for which may easily be transferred from travel and housing allowances unclaimed by "I" officers. This is the right to claim Representation for entertaining done by their wives alone. This is unfortunately long overdue and should be rectified as soon as possible. There are some types of contacts, very important to the mission, that can only be made by the women and they should be reimbursed for doing so. Their role in this capacity, in other words, should not depend on their husbands' being present or on any other diplomats' being present.

The "D" wife will naturally insist

that her official work be recognized and evaluated by the Ambassador or someone designated by him to do so. Conversely, she would resent spending her time and energy for the commonweal and having it go unnoticed. She will not be ashamed or afraid of having this evaluation included in her husband's efficiency report which is where it belongs and where it can be made readily available to those responsible for making appropriate assignments. On request, a "D" wife may at any time receive a copy of the evaluation from the Department of State for use as experience or job reference when seeking employment outside the Embassy either abroad or at home.

Under the Sherer Plan the Grievance Board becomes an even more vital, although hopefully less active, tool than it already is. As there is no way and never will be a way of defining perfection in the interpersonal relationships of an unpredictable combination of human beings in unpredictable situations at all of our foreign posts (c.f. MRB-

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20 is so disappointing) much will, as always, have to be left to the intelligence, good sense, good manners, and good taste of the participants on the spot. In resolving cases of significant conflict the Grievance Board will be handy. As now, it will have the right to refuse to review a case which is outside its authority and it will, of course, no longer be concerned with grievances of "I" wives since they will formally have shed themselves of any connection with or responsibility to their husbands' official life. This will significantly ease the work of the Board.

It should also be kept in mind that under the Sherer Plan an officer may change his category from "I" to "D" or vice versa when he changes his post or of course during his assignment if he marries or divorces while at the post. It is quite possible, for example, that a wife who chooses to be a "D" in Dakar might prefer to be "I" in Paris. The Plan is flexible enough to allow this luxury. It will, in addition, better serve the needs of the Chief of Mission than the present

system because he will be informed in advance of what he may expect from the wife and what the housing and allowance pattern will be. There should be any number of circumstances in which the Chief of Mission may especially desire an "I" officer at a post. Formerly only bachelors could be considered for these jobs, but the Sherer Plan would provide a much wider choice of candidates and, by the same token, an Ambassador may request a "D" candidate in cases where he judges the vacancy on his staff particularly requires it.

It is no news that changing times and attitudes necessitate the adoption or at least trial of new solutions to old problems. It may be that these days the young people, especially married women, who are motivated by a strong desire to serve their country are not joining the Foreign Service in as great numbers as they used to. They are perhaps staying in the United States because they are more interested in finding solutions for domestic social problems than they are in foreign

affairs. From reviewing the numerous articles and letters of women as they have appeared in the JOURNAL, it is clear that there is a group that should be respected whose resentments are based on their oft-repeated statement, "But I didn't join the Foreign Service. My husband did."

This is one of the present day dilemmas that the Sherer Plan is designed to resolve. Everyone who has had several posts in the Foreign Service knows that the quality of life at the post depends on the women and the extent to which they organize themselves to keep it high. Nothing will change that; and doubtless we still have enough wives at each post who are willing and able to undertake that responsibility so that no one need participate who prefers another occupation. What is important is that we somehow revive the system for having their enormous contribution evaluated and recognized for what it really is, an essential ingredient in the smooth functioning of all our overseas missions. ■

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