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Review of *Tempest over Teapot Dome: The Story of Albert B. Fall* by David H. Stratton

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Tempest over Teapot Dome: The Story of Albert B. Fall. By David H. Stratton. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998. Illustrations, sources, index. xvi + 376 pp. \$29.95.

David H. Stratton has written a brilliant, comprehensive biography of Albert B. Fall, Secretary of Interior during the Harding administration and the first cabinet member ever convicted and imprisoned for crimes committed while holding office. Fall had leased to Harry E. Sinclair and Edward L. Doheny naval oil reserves in Wyoming's Teapot Dome and California's Elk Mountain and accepted \$404,000 from these oil tycoons. The book proposes that out of his early career as a western speculator and corporation lawyer, Fall developed an anti-conservation philosophy and espoused unrestrained and immediate disposition of public lands to private enterprise. Thus, had he not turned over the naval leases to Doheny and Sinclair, he would have done so to other representatives of private enterprise. The real offense was Fall's efforts to overturn Progressive era reforms, especially natural resource conservation and the restraining of corporate power.

Before getting to the Teapot Dome scandal, Stratton recounts Fall's colorful life in the Southwest. Fall's involvement as a Democrat in Dona Ana County politics and in the statehood movement for New Mexico, his election as one of the first Republican US Senators from New Mexico, and his connections in Mexico are all described in the early chapters. As Senator, Fall was considered an authority on Mexican affairs; during the Mexican Revolution he criticized President Wilson's Mexican policy and advocated American military involvement to protect American property. Fearful of a German-Mexican alliance before the United States entered World War I, he offered to resign his Senate seat to organize a volunteer force for operations along the US-Mexican border. As American involvement in World War I became more imminent, Fall became increasingly interested in European affairs and supported Wilson's early war policies.

After the war, however, he became a major opponent of the President's Versailles Treaty as one of the "irreconcilables" largely because of what he perceived to be Wilson's personal offenses against him. While Fall was still in mourning over losing his only son and one of his two daughters to the so-called Spanish flu, Wilson rallied American voters to elect Democratic congressmen supportive of the Treaty. Moreover, Wilson fought against Fall's 1918 re-election, stating that Fall had been repeatedly hostile towards the administration's foreign policy.

In his final chapters Stratton describe Fall's tenure as interior secretary, the oil leases, the Teapot Dome investigation, and Fall's conviction. After an unsuccessful appeal to the Supreme Court to review his bribery conviction, Fall's efforts to stay out of prison lay with a presidential pardon that never materialized; the ailing Fall served nearly ten months.

Stratton's biography is the definitive study of this interesting political figure who made history at the state and national levels. Some of Stratton's primary sources include manuscript collections, interviews, and newspapers; in addition, he makes good use of secondary material. The study is not without flaw, however. Despite his extensive use of sources, Stratton does not document his study. Thus one has no idea where the information or extensive quotations used throughout the book originate. Additionally, Stratton at times credits Fall for certain accomplishments while ignoring others' roles. At one point, for example, he states that Fall "and another Democratic leader" secured legislation establishing the normal institutions in Silver City and Las Vegas.

The book's value lies in its topic: Albert B. Fall's impact on New Mexico and national history from 1915 to 1923. *Tempest over Teapot Dome* provides invaluable information to both the academician and the lay reader interested in New Mexico history and Republican national policies.

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