

IRRIGATION IN THE U.S.A.

To the Editor, LAND & LIBERTY.

SIR,—You have asked me for some observations on the prospective land reclamation project for the Missouri Valley, which was described in a recent issue of the *London News Chronicle*. The work now being done is of minor extent and only to meet so-called emergencies. Whether this vast public work will be executed under a Federal 'Authority' statute, similar to the famous T.V.A. has not yet been decided.

Powerful forces have blocked all attempts to enact such Federal legislation to date, and with Republicans now in control of Congress there promises to be a real battle. The feudal forces are all united in demanding that Congress should pay the cost of the project out of the Federal treasury knowing full well that no part of the cost of the work would be charged to them in the form of a tax on the value of land benefited by the project. The reason is that under our constitutional system, Congress would not be authorised to collect the cost of such public works by means of an annual tax or rate levied upon the value of the land since that would be what our court calls a 'direct' tax, which the Congress may only levy on condition that it is to be apportioned among the States, according to the population. In other words, any direct tax levied by Congress must be upon all the land in the Nation, not on just a portion of it. Obviously, all the land in all the States could not validly be taxed to pay the cost of this project which will benefit directly only the land within the Missouri valley.

Because of this constitutional limitation the cost of this project, if the funds to build it are taken out of the Federal treasury, must be repaid by the users of water and power, and by the tax-payers all over the nation, consequently the cost of the project will be paid mainly by the receipts from excise, sales, inheritance, income and taxes of every kind and description, except only that none of it will be collected as a tax on the private holders of land-titles, as such, for as long as they may hold the land idle and waste.

Of course, once they get busy, or allow others to use the land, and derive an income from it, there is a Federal tax on such income, but no Federal tax at all if the title-holders for any reason prefer to sit back and do nothing.

Nowhere have the fiscal principles necessary to protect the common good been more clearly or ably explained than by Mr. L. East, in *The Faith of an Engineer*, published in LAND & LIBERTY March 1946 issue. President Roosevelt was alive to this economic pressure, and the necessity of protecting the people against it, for he said, '... there is little difference between the feudal system and the fascist system. If you believe in one, you lean to the other. With the overwhelming majority of our people, I oppose feudalism... Men and women in the professions, the overwhelming majority of the small shopkeepers, a growing number of the bankers and business men—they are coming to see more and more that the continuation of the American system calls for the *elimination of special privilege*, the dissemination of the whole truth, the participation in prosperity by the people at the bottom of the ladder, as well as those at the top.' (Speech at Gainesville, Ga., March 23, 1938.)

The chief opposition to the creation of a Federal 'authority' to build and administer this vast land reclamation and hydro-electric power project naturally comes from the powerful privately-owned electric corporations who view with deep concern the creation of new Government-owned power generating plants. They know that in the Tennessee Valley Congress required the T.V.A. to give priority and preference to cities or districts which wished to distribute the Government-owned power direct to factories and the public. The privately owned corporations know that scores of public agencies are to-day distributing electricity in the vast Tennessee Valley at low rates to former customers of the private power companies.

There is therefore a strong pressure to block any such Federal legislation and a demand that the work can and should be done by the States acting under a compact patterned after the seven-State compact which proved so helpful and important in relation to the vast Boulder Canyon Dam project of 1928.

If the money to pay the cost of the Missouri project was borrowed by the States under a compact between the States whose land will benefit from the project, a portion at least of the cost of the project could be recovered by means of a direct annual tax or rate on privately held land within each State. That would not of course eliminate the special privilege as Roosevelt advocated, but it would apply definite

pressure on all speculative holders of land for they would soon realise that it would be too costly to hold the land idle 'waiting for a rise.'

There is thus presented a struggle between titans, the feudal interests on one side, the powerful private forces on the other, with virtually no lobby in Washington big or little speaking for and on behalf of the little fellows.

Former Secretary of the Interior, Hon. Harold L. Ickes, shortly before he was ousted, wrote: 'It is the age-old battle over who is to pocket the unearned increment in land values created by public improvement works.' After that utterance, the campaign to smear and discredit Secretary Ickes grew in heat and intensity until President Truman dismissed the most courageous and incorruptible Secretary of the Interior this Nation has ever had, or perhaps will ever have.

Yours etc.,

J. RUPERT MASON.

SAN FRANCISCO.

UNCIVILISED

An ancient ape, once on a time,
Disliked exceedingly to climb,
And so he picked him out a tree,
And said, "Now this belongs to me.
I have a hunch that monks are mutts,
And I can make them gather nuts
And bring the bulk of them to me,
By claiming title to this tree."

He took a green leaf and a reed
And wrote himself a title-deed,
Proclaiming pompously and slow:
"All monkeys by these presents know"—
Next morning, when the monkeys came
To gather nuts, he made his claim:
"All monkeys climbing on this tree
Must bring their gathered nuts to me,
Cracking the same on equal shares;
The meats are mine, the shells are theirs."

"But by what right?" they cried, amazed,
Thinking the ape was surely crazed.
"By this," he answered, "if you'll read,
You'll find it is a title-deed,
Made in precise and formal shape
And sworn before a fellow-ape
Exactly on the legal plan
Used by that wondrous creature, man,
In London, Tokio, New York,
Glengarry, Kalamazoo and Cork,
Unless my deed is recognised,
It proves you quite uncivilised."
"But," said one monkey, "you'll agree
It was not you who made this tree."
"Nor," said the ape, serene and bland,
"Does any owner make his land,
Yet all of its hereditaments
Are his and figure in his rents."

The puzzled monkeys sat about;
They could not make the question out.
Plainly, by precedent and law,
The ape's procedure showed no flaw;
And yet, no matter what he said,
The stomach still denied the head.

Up spoke one sprightly monkey then:
"Monkeys are monkeys; men are men.
The ape should try his legal capers
On men who may respect his papers.
We don't know deeds; we do know nuts,
And spite of 'ifs' and 'ands' and 'buts,'
We know who gathers and un-meats 'em,
By monkey practice also eats 'em."

"So tell the ape and all his flunkies,
No man-tricks can be played on monkeys."
Thus, apes still climb to get their food,
Since monkeys' minds are crass and crude:
And monkeys, all so ill-advised,
Still eat their nuts, uncivilised.

EDMUND VANCE COOKE.