

Letters To The Editor

AMERICAN WATER LAWS

SIR,—I appreciate your summarizing for your readers my lengthy discussion of American water laws and their reform. In general the summary presented the essence of my proposal faithfully. I would like to emphasise, however, that it is not simply a proposal to charge for the use of water; but also for the use of congested facilities for moving water.

It is not correct to state that the high proposed land tax on central lands would prevent wasteful use of water there. It would prevent wasteful non-use of lands there; but the object is to encourage greater use of water near the source, thereby obviating part of the transportation network. Neither is it correct to say that peripheral landholders would be encouraged by a low land tax to use all the water they need. The object is to reduce their water use, by higher water rates, again tending to obviate uneconomical extensions of aqueducts. There would also be a charge for water itself, F.O.B. the source. It is this charge that constrains users at all locations not to waste water as such.

Yours faithfully,

MASON GAFFNEY.

Columbia, U.S.A.

(We regret our misunderstanding of this matter and gladly publish this correction. — Ed.)

A HAULIER REPLIES

SIR,—As the holder of a carrier's licence for household removals I was interested in Mr. E. P. Middleton's article on "The Evils of Licensed Road Haulage," although the word "Evils" is too strong.

Mr. Middleton makes much of an alleged commerce in carriers' licences. When a transport business is sold the licence is bound-up with the goodwill, the value of the vehicles, and any other assets. This makes open to question an attempt to fix a separate value for the licence. But just suppose it is right to suggest that an 'A' licence might be valued at £1,000 per vehicle. That will reduce the whole matter to proportion, for the cost of providing £1,000 is the interest on it, say £70 per annum; and the cost of putting a lorry and driver on the road (garaging, taxation licence, insurance, basic wage, interest on cost, depreciation) is probably about £700 to £900 per an-

num without mileage or overhead costs. Therefore there is here implied no relatively high assessment of the restrictive effect of the licence as a source of monopoly profit. Since the introduction of the licensing system in 1933 there has in fact been an "inordinate" increase in the number of vehicles engaged on road transport for hire or reward, and the vehicles are owned by firms of all sizes, from one or two vehicles to hundreds.

Mr. Middleton writes as if it were accepted on all hands that road haulage is inefficient. To establish this it would be desirable to explain how efficiency can be measured and then give some unfavourable figures. There may be nothing inefficient in a vehicle's running 100 miles with a part-load and then running back empty, provided the hirer considered the transport necessary at that time and provided that there has been an attempt to share with other transport requirements the available outward capacity and the homeward empty vehicle. The constant watch for such sharing arrangements requires large business organisations or a co-operative of small enterprises. The possible introduction of additional small firms by abolition of licensing would certainly not improve this aspect of transport economics. Again there are various classes of pay-load that require specialised handling and/or specialised vehicles, which may entirely rule out any sharing arrangements with other transport work.

'C' licensed vehicles constitute the private transport systems of manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers, but are not free to carry for hire or reward. Mr. Middleton's article suggests that 'C' vehicles have multiplied "inordinately" because the service offered by 'A' and 'B' licence-holders is too dear, or inadequate. But the obvious reason for the increase in 'C' vehicles is the manifold advantage that firms find in having their transport arrangements entirely under their control. If the restriction were abolished these vehicles could pick up other transport work to reduce the net cost, with further increase of their numbers.

There comes from Mr. Middleton's article the incorrect impression that the Road Haulage Association and other transport associations work as

cartels, with fixed prices and therefore with suppression of competition. The trade associations analyse operating costs and recommend rates of charge that will cover costs, but such rates cannot be enforced.

A matter that Mr. Middleton might have given his views on, or those of Mr. Jenkin or Mr. Yorke, is the balance between road transport and railway goods-traffic. The spread of road transport has been a main factor in creating necessity for vast expenditure on roads. Even without nationalised road haulage the Government can decide — or can take powers to decide — on what terms, and for what kinds of load, road haulage shall compete with rail haulage.

Yours faithfully,

A. BATTY.

Edgware, Middlesex.

ENVIRONMENT AND MORAL DEFECTS

SIR,—In the article *Original Sin* (LAND AND LIBERTY, June/July, 1962) the writer, F. McEachran, touched upon a very crucial point. He said: "If then the environment we are discussing is the social environment of man *then it is, or was, the action of men which originally caused the maladjustment in society . . .*" (emphasis mine). "Examples of this would be when men first 'enslaved' other men, or when men first 'enclosed' land . . ." he also said. Mr. McEachran did not seem to think that these actions flowed from 'moral defects' in human nature.

Upon first reading what is quoted above, I disagreed, but perhaps it may be said that if men do not have an idea of right and wrong, they cannot be said to have a moral defect, or moral virtue either. Perhaps the enslavers and enclosers had no idea that they were saying by their actions: "You (the victim of my actions) do not have as much *right* to live as I, because I am stronger than you." It would seem to me that the idea that all men have equal right to live is a moral notion and that to have no sense or awareness of it might be considered as a "moral defect."

Mr. McEachran did well to point out that individual actions make environment — that the initiating forces that determine men's actions come from within them — not from without (and certainly this is true of dominating or strong personalities). To start with environment in thinking of the human problem is simply to travel in circles. Our movement is