

Water for Parched Lands

by Jesse B. Gay

WATER is a prime concern of every resident of California. All areas contribute in tax money to pay the cost of flood control projects and to the relief of flood sufferers. The completion of the Feather River Project (in Eastern California) will relieve critical lack of water in many parched areas and provide for the development of other areas. Twenty-seven counties in which 80 per cent of the state's population lives will be especially benefited. Because of the integration of California economy all counties will share in increased production.

Problems of engineering may be left to persons qualified by training and experience, but each citizen is concerned with establishment of a just system for the collection of money needed for construction of water projects and a fair method of distribution. If fresh water in sufficient quantity were now obtainable from the sea by solar evaporation, the claim of any county to sole right to the sea water or to the sun's rays would be preposterous. Equally preposterous is the idea that because rain or snow falls over certain counties they are in justice given the right to more of the precipitation than they can well use.

The Feather River Project will

make formerly sterile land productive and will increase the productivity of land already in use. Land values and consequent rentals will rise in direct proportion to the benefit received from the availability of water. The wisdom and justice of fixing the cost of construction and maintenance of water projects upon land values irrespective of improvements upon the land therefore becomes apparent.

The philosophy of taxing land values is not new in California. The Wright Act was voted into the state constitution as divisions 10 and 11 of the water code in 1879. Under this code the state's irrigation districts have reclaimed 4.5 million acres of semi-arid lands in California. The code provides that "directors of irrigation districts can levy an annual assessment on the land *exclusive of improvements*, sufficient for its obligations."

Thousands of families have been established upon these acres whose exemption from taxation upon improvements has encouraged best use. The creation of a super Feather River Irrigation District under the Wright Act would provide the method for its financing and maintenance. It would tie in with irrigation districts already in existence and with others in contemplation.