

New Land Reform Group Challenges Agri-Corporations

ITT not only shreds memos and fiddles with South American politics, but also raises pigs. Greyhound (turkeys) and John Hancock (soybeans) are two more of the corporate farmers controlling huge blocks of land, mostly in California.

According to the newly-founded National Coalition for Land Reform, the conglomerates hold their individual farmers in feudal servitude, waste water and destroy ecological balance, lobby the government out of millions in tax breaks and agricultural subsidies, violate various federal laws, and in the end show their true colors by selling their holdings for high-profit developments.

The hot spot of the land reform controversy is the Imperial Valley, where 80% of the land is held by such absentee landlords as Purex, Dow Chemical, Southern Pacific, and Kaiser Aluminum. At issue is the Reclamation Act of 1902, which states that farmers using federally-supplied water must live on or near their property and may not receive water for more than 160 acres. But the Reclamation Act has not been enforced since the 1930's when the valley began receiving water from Boulder Dam.

In November, 1971, an out-of-state judge upheld the residency requirement. The Justice Department claims that it's too late to enforce the law after such a long breach of it, but may be persuaded otherwise by those who point to the Department's enforcement of an even older anti-pollution law in the past two years.

Senators Fred Harris (D., Okla.), Birch Bayh (D., Ind.), Gaylord Nelson (D., Wis.), and others have introduced legislation enabling the government to buy the now-illegally held land and re-sell it to

small farmers. Senator Adlai Stevenson (D., Ill.), after holding hearings on land distribution in his committee on migrant labor, declared that federal subsidies to large corporations force small farmers off the land and send rural workers onto city welfare rolls.

Senator John Tunney (D., Calif.) and President Nixon, however, oppose enforcing the 1902 law.

Redistributing land would help the environment as well as the financially beleaguered small farmer, says the Coalition. Evidence from another group, the Environmental Defense Fund, shows that small farmers use less water, fewer pesticides, and less chemical fertilizer per acre than corporate farmers. Corporations tend to have less interest in how the city

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Tax Windfall for N. J. Business?

Next January marks the deadline for New Jersey legislators to come up with a new way to finance schools, and a special session has been set for June. Governor Cahill's tax policy committee recommended a graduated state income tax and a statewide property tax of \$1 per \$100 of market value. At the moment Cahill's Republicans are studying Democrats' charges that the tax package presents a \$200 million windfall to business and industry. While individuals have their taxes shifted from property to income, they say, business and industry are relieved of \$460 million in property taxes without a corresponding increase in other taxes.

Restrictive Zoning Struck Down in New Jersey Court

"Going all the way" is a phrase that's moved out of the back seats of automobiles and into the newspapers, its fervor and frequency applying to conflicts people want adjudicated by the U.S. Supreme Court. The limits at issue now are those of zoning ordinances excluding apartment house construction and low-income groups from the southern New Jersey town of Mount Laurel.

It was here on the outskirts of Philadelphia that a N.J. State Superior Court judge recently ruled exclusionary zoning unconstitutional because of economic discrimination. With wording reminiscent of the school financing decision earlier this year, Judge Martino declared that the town had used "Federal, state, county and local finances and resources solely for the betterment of middle- and upper-income persons."

Past zoning decisions have merely struck down the offending provisions. But this ruling orders the town to identify and tabulate the present and future housing needs of low and moderate income groups—and present a plan within 90 days to meet these housing needs. The ruling thus deals with both the zoning regulation banning apartment houses and an "unofficial policy" of coercing poor people to move away by not employing available housing subsidy funds. This was alleged by the legal group bringing the suit, who pointed to the doubling of population in Mount Laurel about every ten years, with blacks comprising 16% of the population 30 years ago and only 3% at present.

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