

The Fantastic Empires

TOWARD RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT, by Edward F. Renshaw, Idyia Press, Chicago, 1957

Reviewed by
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THE author calls this book "An Economic Appraisal of Federal Investment in Water Resource Programs," and his purpose is to inform the citizenry of the nature and magnitude of the economic values associated with contemporary investment. "In a sense," he states, "this is a plea for responsible and honest government. That end, it seems to me, can only be hoped for if the true beneficiaries from water resources are forced to bear the cost of investment in proportion to the benefits received."

The writer's conclusions are clear and simple. He shows how certain programs, worthy in conception and instituted under well-designed controls, have since mushroomed into vast empires supported by indefensible formulas and yardsticks. All who are interested in cutting unjustifiable government expenditures, and especially members of Congress serving on appropriation committees and leaders in investment and business circles, should certainly read this book, but might find its style too abstract and technical for comfort.

To say that in no one of the government programs examined was there

a consistent policy of returning a dollar of benefit for a dollar spent, would be an over simplification of the author's conclusion. This is, however, the inescapable impression one receives from the practical evidence presented.

I was associated with some of the water resource programs between 1935 and 1940 and recall the ever-present controversy between proponents of the theory that floods can be controlled by "holding the water where it falls," and those who clamor for bigger dams and reservoirs (especially if some electric power can be tucked in unobtrusively). This difference of opinion, though fairly mild in those days, has assumed monstrous proportions. Today six separate government agencies are contesting bitterly for budget dollars with which to extend their empires, often on the slimmest of justifications and the most sophisticated formulas.

The author points out, for instance, that while some government agencies are frantically trying to get money to expand the crop lands by highly expensive methods, others are just as frantically trying to cope with the ever-rising flood of surplus farm products. In order for this book to serve the important purpose for which it was intended, its contents should be brought to the attention of legislators in the hopes of forcing spending agencies into a more realistic evaluation of their programs.

Emily E. F. Skeel of Harriman, New York, who died recently in Pasadena, was a Geologist of long standing, who left a memorial bequest to the school honoring her good friends: Charlotte Schetter, Julia B. Kellogg, and Joseph Dana Miller, all of whom served the cause faithfully for many years.

Ernest M. Ginders of Morfa Nefyn, Wales, who was mentioned in the December, 1957 HGN as the man whose many, well-thought-out letters gave the impetus for the land value legislation in Jamaica, B.W.I. has slipped away after a long and useful life.