

Noah D. Alper's Brief Cases

COAL AND RENT-OF-LAND

"Land prices have soared in a little over a year from \$150 to \$200 an acre to \$1,000, \$2,000 and perhaps even \$3,000 an acre. There are few holdouts." This is from Belmont County, Ohio where in one 346,000 acre county alone, 200,000 acres of pasture land and woodlots have been sold, leased or optioned to coal strippers. The mining company "coal hunters" say those who resist are the land agents competing for the remaining farms. They use "block-busting tactics, surrounding wanted properties with coal leases to force sales," according to a Post-Dispatch news service.

We are reaping the fruits of the Roman, British-American land policies that deny economic justice in land. We are doomed to smother in layer upon layer of taxes, private and public costs of urban sprawl, and ever increasing costs of caring for people who are not being permitted to take care of themselves.

EDUCATING THE TAXPAYERS

Saint Louisans will vote in March on a bond issue to erect a convention center intended to shore up property values in the downtown area. In an editorial, "Now to Educate the Taxpayers," the St. Louis Post-Dispatch favors the bond campaign stating it will produce gains immediately for property owners and tenants in all parts of the city, rich and poor alike."

In the same editorial section, under "Creative Conservation," there is high commendation for Missouri's largest landholder who has set up a foundation to which he has given four unique sites. These consist of 482 diverse acres with spectacular canyons, rock bridges and springs, which have not been easily available to visitors. The plan is to hold them until they can be.

What is the missing ingredient in such good proposals? Will all benefit equally? In a physical sense perhaps, but not in a fiscal sense. As the experiences of history indicate, a few will gain, but the majority will pay "through the nose" as they say in Southeast Missouri.

RIGHTING AN INJUSTICE

Under a picture showing the President signing a measure restoring to the Taos Pueblo Indians of New Mexico their sacred "Blue Lake Lands" consisting of 48,000 acres, was the caption, "Righting an Injustice." Brief Cases has advocated giving all the land of the continental 49 states back to the Indians, and Hawaii back to the Hawaiians. This would be a step in righting the most far-flung injustice of all, but let's make certain all have full citizenship rights. The white and black majority will gladly let the Indians keep the land, but will tax its full value to support government as far as it will go. Some Indian chiefs may not like this, but the little Indians will.

A STRAW IN THE WIND?

"Bruce T. Sommer, 8th Ward candidate for the St. Louis Board of Aldermen, is urging new city and state laws to encourage homeowners to make improvements to prevent neighborhoods from running down," according to the St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

The city encourages big business to redevelop and rehabilitate business districts, but he says business districts without healthy and livable neighborhoods are not worth saving. He therefore proposed a tax exemption program requiring a state constitutional change and a new state law to enable the city to provide up to 20 percent on the improvements for the first 10 years.

Land itself has no value. Value arises only from human labor.

—Henry George