

An Object Lesson

By GEORGE L. RUSBY

A MOST interesting subject for study and reflection is the economic status of the Indians of our southwest.

Roughly, these Indians may be divided into two groups, represented, respectively, by the Navajos and the Pueblos. And these groups present contrasts not ordinarily suspected to exist.

When Mexico ceded that southwest territory to the United States, she was honorable enough to except certain tracts of land which she had previously deeded to the Indians, and which tracts those tribes continue to own today. They appoint their own judges, conduct their own courts and try criminals according to the standards of their own laws. It comes as a surprise to learn of these tracts which, though physically within the borders of the United States, do not in effect belong to us.

These Indians are known as the "Pueblos." And it is with amazement that the casual observer who is familiar with the poverty and general degradation of the Navajos first contacts these Pueblos. Nowhere could we find a more glaring contrast than is here presented, between the effects, respectively, on a given race, of a just land tenure system even when crudely administered, and an unjust system.

Considering their crude methods it is not reasonable to expect to find great wealth among them; but there is enough for all, and those red men give evidence of getting more out of life than does the average white—who, in spite of advanced civilization leads a meagre and starved existence, the chief excitement of which is in the effort to keep a job and make both ends meet.

Only prejudice or ignorance of economic principles could prevent one from here recognizing the direct effects of a prevailing land tenure system. The Pueblos own their lands in common. Every one can have as much land as he wants for use, but no more. Holding land idle, for speculative purposes is out of the question. But there is no such thing as compulsory sharing of product. What a man produces is recognized as belonging to him exclusively.

To cite one illustration of the sagacity and common sense of these native Americans, and their concept of justice: A member of a certain tribe left and did not return. At the time of his departure he had a farm which he had spent several years in developing and bringing to a high state of cultivation. For a long time after he left, the farm lay idle awaiting his return, meantime becoming over-grown and run down. Another member of the tribe took possession and devoted several years more to its restoration. Then a grandson of the original occupant unexpectedly appeared on the scene and insisted on taking possession. He was refused and the case went before the Indian Court.

The judge, after hearing all the evidence rendered his decision: "Yes, it is quite fitting and proper that you should have your grandfather's old farm; but this other man has spent much time and labor restoring it. Go, you, get a piece of wild land, develop it and improve it as this man has done with your grandfather's farm, and then exchange with him."

"Lo, the poor Indian!" How much we might learn from him!

Pre-Georgian Justice

By LANCASTER M. GREENE

THE INDIANS of 19 pueblos (villages) have a record of centuries of peace among themselves and with their neighbors, says Philip Lucero, the sheriff of Isleta—a pueblo 13 miles from Albuquerque.

"Why have you been more peaceful than the Navajo, Shoshone, Blackfeet or Piate?" I asked Mr. Lucero.

"We have a different way of living," he replied.

"Do you believe in private property?"

"Oh yes, indeed," he said. "We think that what a man builds is his and what he grows is his after he pays any loans. For our community we collect rent for the land he uses. See that house and that store over there? They belong to those who made them, but they pay rent for the land."

"How does a youngster coming into your world get a start?" I queried.

"We allot him a tract of land as soon as he is ready to work it. When he wants to build a home we let him have the site, and he owes rent to Isleta Pueblo for the site. He has just as much right to the earth as the rest of us; as much right to the sun, the wind and the rain. We own 147 square miles of land here, with some of those mountains to the east included. We own all this together, but each owns the results of his work individually. See that mountain? It has fine timber, and we sold a lot of it and the money belongs to each of us—we are demanding this from the Federal Government who are holding it. I want you to meet our oldest Councilman, Mr. P. J. Lente, who knows more about our traditions and our problems than anyone. You see we are self governing and we elect a governor, two sheriffs and 12 councilmen."

Mr. Lente told us the Isleta's greatest worry is over a bill to make Indians citizens of the USA. They have held long meetings over the fearful possibilities, for they may become liable for our kinds of taxes and lose their equality of opportunity, and with it their peace with one another and their self-government.

The proceeds of their recent timber sale for about \$7,800 are being held by the United States for Isleta "emergencies." The Isletas say this sum belongs to them and they are the sole judges of what an emergency is. They are not wards of the United States like many other Indian tribes but independent equals.

Alert young Pueblo Indians read of the millions in oil received by certain individual Indians in tribes which parcelled their land to one generation of individuals in perpetuity, gave up ground dues and substituted income taxes. They are weighing the internal war in their tribe and its disintegration against the possibility of personal advantage to themselves. So far the adventures have been told to try the USA where there is strife and tension between man and man, where prizes await a few, and where children are not assured of the equal opportunity which is their inheritance in a pueblo. The Pueblos have lived the same way for 400 years at least. It is to be hoped that they can achieve some of our "progress without poverty," retaining the basis in their ground dues and private property in the products of labor.

"What Unemployment?"

By DONALD MacDONALD

THIS IS the story of Tommie Jackson, Tinnah Athabaskan Indian of the Upper Copper River—an aborigine in a country where the older tribesmen still have their noses pierced for rings, where the bow and arrow is still used to save valuable ammunition. Nez Coy, which means The Questioner, was his Indian name, for Tommie was by way of being a philosopher and his method was the Socratic one—he asked questions. . . .

One day we were out blazing a trail. We had our lunch wrapped in a newspaper. It bore the flaming headline "Unemployment Crisis." The big word struck Tommie's eye immediately. "Now what she mean?"

"Well," said I, "unemployment means no work. White man think work very good—he fix it so almost everybody has to work."

"No savvy me how white man think work good," he said.

Apparently Tommie had a grasp of the basic fact of economics—that man seeks to satisfy his desires with the least exertion—more than most college graduates seem to know. "Well," I said, "Tommie, I told you this was going to be tough—but white man fix it so you have to work. He gives all the Caribou to one man, all the foxes to another man, all the fish to another man, all the trees to still another, and you have to pay \$5.00 before you can kill a Caribou or a fox, cut a tree or catch a fish. So then you have to work to get the \$5.00."

"I know what I do," said Tommie, "I sit down."

"Oh no, Tommie, one man own all the sitting-down places. You have to buy a place to sit down or pay so much every day. White man fix it so you have no place to sit down—you keep moving. Such men, without place to sit down, who keep moving we call 'bums.' You heard that word at the trading post."

This thing of buying a place to sit down (a home) had Tommie completely flabbergasted. After considerable thought, mutterings and growlings in his own guttural tongue, he burst out "How he get that way—one man own all the sitting-down places, the trees, the Caribou—you tell me that."

"Well," said I, "maybe so Government fix him that way."

"Huh," said Tommie, "Me hear much about him, never saw him. What does he look like?"

I had to explain government. "Maybe so all same your Chief."

"Our Chief," said Tommie, "He Chief to do us good—not bad—our Chief us bad we kill him quick. White man think unemployment bad damn fool him."

Many days Tommie Jackson Nez Coy worried over the white man's system. He saw men drive stakes to hold mining ground. He saw the trappers pre-empting his hunting grounds. He saw the terrible system coming. He asked me whether white men all thought it right to charge for sitting down places. So I told him the story of Henry George, and now there is a little Henry George Jackson on the Upper Copper River. But still the question came, and so the end. Tommie Jackson, the Questioner, killed himself. "He think too much," the other Indians said.

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