

One Man's Opinion

by Hugh S. Johnson

A VOX-POPPER calls the running row between myself and Secretary Ickes a racket, saying, "There's fees in them thar' fu-eds." This is only partly true, but the fu-ed is a bore to all hands. It never gets as hot as the bloodthirstier fans like, for two reasons: (1) I like the Secretary; (2) while I abominate his oratorical and other outgivings, I think he is by so far the best Secretary of the Interior that we have had that there isn't any runner-up. Concessions like these, which in fairness I must make, go in the stately sayonaras of the Senate, but not on the hustings. Accordingly, the debate to end all debates in this series has already occurred.



Gen. Johnson

That does not mean that I can't comment on some of Donald Duck's quackier utterances. He frequently goes to Chicago to tell that city what a boon he has been to it by "giving it a subway" and the "greatest sewage disposal plant in the world." Recently he waddled out to California to quack peace into the Newdealocrat situation there, with extraordinarily disastrous results. Before that result was clear, he also went to Texas, leaving an impression that this was a political third-term mission there also. The original Texas Garnerite, Amon Carter, called him a "carpet-bagger." In the manner of his wooing of Chicago, Mr. Ickes replied: "I have gone to Texas bearing gifts—rich gifts—not a few of them—and you never thought of calling me a carpet-bagger." He related also how he went into Texas and pulled the oil industry out of a mess "that you yourself had created."

* * *

THIS is pretty terrible. How did Honest but Horrendous Harold "give" Chicago its subway and sewerage plant and Texas its "rich gifts"? How did he save the oil industry? Not a nickel went into either locality as a Federal hand-out that a nickel-and-a-half wasn't taken

out of it in Federal taxes or obligated in Federal borrowing. The oil industry's overproduction was checked by the NRA Oil Code, which was the industry's own agreement with Government, with the negotiation of which Mr. Ickes had nothing whatever to do.

The Federal Government has no money that it doesn't take out of the states. If they were permitted to exercise their own taxing and spending power, they could control both by their own votes. By permitting the Federal Government to do it for them, state officials escape their own responsibilities, but they surrender their own authorities. They have to come kowtowing to unelected Federal and Ickensian pooch-bahs to get back their own and then have to suffer the impertinence and political whip-cracking of those same political task-masters, who remind them threateningly of the "rich gifts" the bureaucrats "come bearing"—which they do like the Greeks.

* * *

THE crack about Chicago's sewage disposal plant was particularly outrageous. Under a Federal permit Chicago didn't have to dump its sewage into the still pool of its only supply of drinking water. In reliance on that permit and at then unprecedented expense and to the tune of great popular applause, it diverted some water of Lake Michigan into the Illinois River and oxidized its sewage. The Federal Government after many years revoked that permit, and suddenly presented Chicago with the greatest problem of sewage disposal in the world. To relieve unemployment the Federal Government returned to Chicago a fraction of the revenue it had taken out of it to help build that plant—and now Mr. Ickes says it was another rich gift from him.

This kind of thing is perilously close to being a kind of personal political extortion. It reveals the peril to local self-government from Federal assumption of local rights and responsibilities and from lump-sum appropriations by billions to appointed officers without legislative allocation.