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Mr. Ickes, "Lord of Alaska"

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THE People of Alaska versus Harold Ickes—these are the contestants in a battle that has been raging for several years.

What is this bone of contention that has caused the Alaskan populace, including the leading figures in press, government, business and pulpit, to unite in wrath against a single man? Briefly, it is the policy of the Department of the Interior, currently Mr. Ickes, of creating vast and multitudinous reserves in Alaska under the guise of "conservationism" or "protecting the aboriginal rights of the Alaskan Indian." On the surface these phrases sound almost virtuous, and for that reason an unsuspecting and well-propagandized public has nearly always supported them in the past.

Beneath the surface, however, lurks the specter of collectivism, whose designs ought to make every freedom-loving American rebel. Recently, Mr. Ickes issued a decree (or was it a "rescript"?) holding up all applications for patents to lands in Alaska. It would have been better to have issued it some years ago, for the writer knows many Alaskans who have grown old, even died, waiting

★ If "conservationism" continues rampant, veterans may find Alaska the land of vast opportunity

for Mr. Ickes to okch their applications for patent *after* paying patent fees and spending years of hardship in a lonely land clearing brush, building houses, and making other improvements necessary to secure title to their lands. Thus the destinies of many men have long depended upon the decision of one man whose pen stroke, or lack of it, often brings complete personal disaster.

Emulating some of his predecessors, but dwarfing all of them, Mr. Ickes has been fervently active in the work of creating additional reservations within the Territory. There have been so many bird, fish, forest, highway, railroad, Indian, military, naval and other reservations created that soon there will be no area in which white men might settle and work out their destinies. Paradoxically, despite all this mess over titles, returning veterans are being advised to go to Alaska and "homestead," even though the chances of finding security in such homesteading are practically nil.

★ WHEN Thane R. Devereaux writes about Alaska and conditions there, he is on a subject of which he has exceptional knowledge. A resident of the Territory for the past four years, he has several times traveled its length and breadth by boat, plane, train and automobile. He has "prospected" at various spots, farmed the Tanana Valley, worked on four Alaska air bases, and was at one time associated with the much publicized Matanuska Valley colonization project. All the while he was doing research and assembling statistics on various aspects of Alaska's many problems.

Some time ago, while speaking on the subject of creating Indian Reservations, Mr. Ickes said: "Nobody's going to get hurt. You'll see how painless it is as it works out." But people *are* getting hurt. Records are proving it. Only so-called little people are usually involved, but they are the kind of people who make up the backbone of America. They constitute the front line in our nation's battles. The blood of these people flowed freely in the war just ended, in the defense of a nation whose Alaskan policies have been utterly unfair to them.

THE STORY of Alaska's vain struggle against forces that would destroy individual security in the use of land and other property runs back almost to the time of its purchase from Russia in 1867 for the sum of \$7,200,000. This battle was part of Alaska's fight for self-government which—with its tragedy, humiliation and insult—constitutes a black page of America's history. Thanks to Gifford Pinchot, the year 1911 brought Alaska's first great stinging defeat.

At that time Alaska had visions of great progress. Railroads were under construction. Private capital was being invested in ever-increasing amounts. Colonization was in progress on a large scale. But it was found that Alaska's developers had enemies. The Territory's rich coal deposits worried eastern coal barons, who believed that their lucrative markets would soon be supplied by Alaskan mines. They decided to protect their interests, disregarding the fact that

Alaska's coal was, for the most part, of inferior grade, and that transportation costs to the States were prohibitive. "Conservation" was their cry, but "Crush all competition" was the real purpose of the eastern coal interests.

Their plan was to use Gifford Pinchot, then Chief Forester in the service of the U.S. Government, in accomplishing their ends. Putting on one of the greatest propaganda campaigns in history, Pinchot, who was also an eastern coal magnate, apparently swayed public opinion to suit his purpose. "Conservation" swept the nation. Pinchot brought charges of fraud against the honest Alaskan coal claimants, and when Secretary of the Interior Richard Ballinger would not agree with this viewpoint the quarrel was referred to a Congressional investigating committee. Ballinger was exonerated, but nevertheless resigned, due to the pressure of public opinion. His successor, a Mr. Fisher, promptly denied five hundred ninety-eight out of six hundred applications for patents to coal deposits—thus branding the claimants as crooks. In the meantime, Pinchot created huge forest reserves throughout the areas containing coal deposits. Infamy reigned supreme.

As a result of the actions of the Department of the Interior at that time, railroad construction stopped. Private capital rapidly withdrew from the field. Twenty thousand men left Alaska. The people who remained were a sorry lot of humanity—let down by their own government. The

generation that survived this bit of treachery is dead or dying, and progress in Alaska has been retarded for a quarter of a century.

Today, thirty-five years later, Alaska is again on the threshold of progress. Private capital is again investing heavily. Thousands of men are in the process of staking new claims. But alas! It seems as if history might repeat itself. Mr. Ickes has become so active in creating additional land reservations and in refusing applications for patent, that everyone is alarmed. Again, fear and uncertainty hang like a dark cloak over the North. Interests already well along in their plans to build and operate a large pulp industry have already withdrawn. Alaska's frustration in many directions is pronounced. But of all the abuses so glaringly characteristic of treatment of Alaska, the one that now infuriates Alaskans most is the policy of the Department of the Interior in creating more Indian reservations.

This policy is erroneous and inexcusable. It is erroneous because, granting that the Alaskan Indians need help, taking their independence away from them and making them perpetual wards of the government, without any real social, economic or political freedom, is hardly a solution of the problem. Such is already the lot of the Indians confined within some two hundred and ten reservations scattered over the forty-eight states. In these reservations within the States most of the Indians live in utter poverty, and 98 per cent of the families make less than five hundred

dollars a year. Without the superintendent's consent they cannot own land within the reservation, nor can they sell, mortgage or lease the plots assigned to them. They are socially segregated and are subject to special laws *because they are Indians*. If the Department of the Interior creates reservations for the American Indian with the alleged purpose of providing for their special welfare, why in the name of justice are living conditions still extremely bad, disease so prevalent and infant mortality so high? These conditions are typical of the reservations in the States, as well as of Alaska. Though the futility of this policy has been proved beyond doubt, it is still being applied to Alaska with reckless abandon.

THERE IS hardly a doubt in anyone's mind that the Indians have just claims to the land needed for their support. But robbing Peter (the white man) to pay Paul (the Indian) creates not only race antagonism but also fosters an evil already present. It promotes economic inequality. It throttles Alaska's entire economy. Let the Alaskan Indian present his claim to the United States Court of Claims, which is authorized by act of Congress to settle these problems in legal fashion. By a reasonable land settlement (such as a homestead or home site), cash payment, or pension, the government could satisfy every claim now before it.

The policy of creating Indian reservations in Alaska is inexcusable because the Alaskan Indians themselves