

# ALASKA AGAIN

EDITORIAL BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

IN the New York "Tribune" of Friday, July 28, there was an article by its Washington correspondent justifying the withdrawal of the Controller Bay lands from the Forest Reserves, and attempting to show that Mr. Garfield, Secretary of the Interior, on the recommendation of Mr. Pinchot, the head of the Forest Service, had, by the elimination from the Forest Reserves of certain areas at Eyak and Valdez Arm, pursued the very course that has been pursued in connection with Controller Bay. The article assumed that I was deceived by Messrs. Garfield and Pinchot. It is hardly necessary to say that any such assumption must be made either with intent to be humorous or with a full knowledge of its falsehood. I was in a peculiar sense responsible for every act of Mr. Pinchot and Mr. Garfield when they held office under me. They represented to a very especial degree the policies and principles which I had especially at heart, and, while of course there were necessarily many actions I took on their recommendation with the details of which it was impossible for me to be acquainted, I was absolutely and entirely cognizant of the principles in accordance with which each one of these acts was taken, and each act faithfully represented the putting into effect of the principles in which I believed and which I had laid down for the guidance of my Administration.

In every part of the country in which there are Forest Reserves it has been found, and it will in the future be found, necessary to make eliminations for town sites, for agricultural purposes, for manufacturing purposes, and the like. Each such case stands on its own merits; each such case depends for its justification upon the conditions existing at the time it is made, and is in no sense a precedent for any other case, arising under new conditions, or when facts hitherto undiscovered have been made known. It may be not only proper to eliminate a given tract of land, but highly improper not to eliminate it; and yet, if the elimination of another tract

of land will give monopoly to a mining company, or a transportation company, or any other company, it may be to the last degree improper. At the time the eliminations at Eyak and Valdez Arm were made, no suggestion had been made to me from any source, nor was there any public knowledge, that there was the slightest danger of the Guggenheim Syndicate, or any other syndicate, obtaining control of Alaska, as the developments during the past three years have shown to be the case, and as has been a matter of public notoriety for at least two years.

Months after the date of these eliminations Cunningham made affidavit that he knew of no entrymen in the Cunningham group that had any contract with the Guggenheim Syndicate; the eliminations being made in July and September, 1907, and the Cunningham affidavit in September, 1908. When these eliminations were made, there was not a vestige of evidence to show that we should be on our guard to prevent such a monopoly as is now evidently threatened. Incidentally, in answer to the assertion of Mr. Ryan that he has no interest whatever in the Guggenheim Syndicate, let me point out the explicit character of the Cunningham affidavit that the Guggenheims had no interest in their claims; and, in any event, our entire past industrial history gives us warrant for saying that, if the Ryan road is built as planned, it will be but a matter of time, and probably a very, very short time, before Ryan's road and the Guggenheim interests are merged into one.

The state of affairs brought to light during the administration of Mr. Ballinger showed conclusively, and for the first time, that we had to guard against monopoly in connection with the development of Alaska, or, to speak more properly, the exploitation of Alaska by a great syndicate for the sole benefit of that syndicate. When the eliminations at Eyak and Valdez Arm were made, not a revelation as regards the Guggenheim Syndicate, or any other syndicate, had been brought to my

attention, or, as far as I knew, or know, to the attention of any man in a responsible position around me, and the public was wholly unaware of the existence of any such state of things as the Ballinger investigation showed to exist.

Whether Mr. Garfield or any one else had been told that the Guggenheims were engaged in a syndicate to act in Alaska, I know not, for I never was informed; but, in any event, it was of no possible consequence, because at that time nothing had developed to show that they had become an exploiting syndicate tending to establish a monopoly in mining and transportation—aside from the fact that it had never been suggested, as it has since been proved, that they were expecting to be the beneficiaries of what has since been declared to be a fraudulent transaction. The difference between elimination in one case and in the other seems to me to be sufficiently obvious.

The eliminations at Eyak and Valdez Arm have no more bearing upon the elimination of the Controller Bay tract than have the previous eliminations in the Rocky Mountain States. In the Rocky Mountain States I eliminated tract after tract of forest reservation to permit of agriculture, of manufacture, or the establishment of town sites; and I refused to make what on the surface were similar eliminations when I became convinced that they were really asked for the purpose of monopolizing the water power.

In the newspaper despatch to which I have referred it is hinted that I acted as I did because I thought the law, then and still in force, sufficiently protected the public interest. Perhaps this is meant to be ironical. It is certain that the law did not sufficiently protect the public interest. It is for that reason that, as President, I repeatedly urged that the laws pertaining to Alaska be amended; as I still urge that they be amended.

In the Eastern States we have suffered from the fact that the ownership of the coal and the ownership of the railways have been permitted to fall into the same hands. What havoc such a combination can work was shown when, during the anthracite strike, the people of a large section of the country were threatened with a winter coal famine which would have caused disasters as great as those of the Civil War. The effort to remedy this

state of affairs by Government action, after it had been permitted to arise because of Government inaction, was necessarily fraught with hardship and suffering for many innocent holders of securities. It is, to my mind, the duty of the United States Government to prevent a similar condition arising in Alaska. I do not believe in the policy of State-owned railways as a general thing; but I am quite willing to see the Panama Railroad owned and run by the Government, as it actually is; and in the same way, if difficulty occurs in connection with what has been done in Controller Bay, I feel that it would be a good thing for the United States to build and operate the short line of railway (with its terminals) which would connect the bay with the coal-fields. Then, with the coal-fields given over to private developers on a leasehold system as simple as possible, and on such terms as to guarantee an ample profit to those engaged in the work of development, the trouble in connection with the Alaska coal-fields would vanish. I have said already that the resources of Alaska must be developed. I advocate with all my heart the conditions of development being made such as to give ample return to those willing to undertake the work, and, as there is an element of hazard in the work, I would prefer to see the Government err, if at all, on the side of liberality in making these conditions. A bill in principle such as, or at least on the general lines of, that introduced by Mr. Robinson, of Arkansas, ought to become law. The Government must itself control the development of Alaska, and adopt as the guiding principle the idea of shaping that development in the interest primarily of the people as a whole, the syndicate or other developing agencies thus receiving benefit only as an incident to conferring it.

I do not think the task is a very difficult one, if only we, the people, personally and through our representatives, approach it with this purpose clearly in mind, and if we insist that the agents of Government act with an understanding of the needs of the people and a resolute purpose to see these needs accomplished, even though it be necessary to override the representatives of the great interests who wish to prevent Alaskan development unless it is shaped primarily to benefit those interests.