

ALASKA—IT MUST BE DEVELOPED

EDITORIAL BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

THE Government of the United States, representing the people of the United States, is not to be excused if it fails immediately to provide laws under which the development of Alaska, and especially the development of the Alaska coal-fields, can proceed without further delay.

During the last twenty years, since the public conscience has been awakened to the need not only of developing but of husbanding our natural resources, there have always been two sets of men apt to throw stumbling-blocks in the way of the development of new territories: first, the men who object to wise laws because they

believe that they can get improper benefits under unwise laws; and, second, the men who in the name of virtue insist upon what is impractical, with the result that they leave unchanged the very conditions to which they in theory object more than any one else. It has proved well-nigh impossible, for instance, to get proper legislation in the great grazing regions of the United States, in part because very wealthy men who wish to exploit the country without regard to the interest of following generations have preferred an era of lawlessness, and in part because well-meaning but ignorant and narrow-minded men, many of whom sincerely believed

that they were the special champions of the settler and the special opponents of the big special privilege corporation, rendered effective aid to their nominal foes by declining to accept reasonable changes in the law, and therefore perpetuated the conditions that insure fraud and wrongdoing. When, under the law, no man could get more than one hundred and sixty acres, and when no man could earn a livelihood unless he obtained many times one hundred and sixty acres of a given kind of land, there were only two alternatives: either the land could undergo no development at all (for free range meant nothing but destruction) or else there had to be illegal fencing. Under these conditions there was generally illegal fencing, and although some of the men who thus illegally fenced the public territory were deliberate wrong-doers who sought to keep conditions unchanged because they profited by lawlessness, others were well-meaning men led into wrongdoing by the laws themselves, which had created a situation such that success could come only through wrongdoing.

In Alaska our present laws are so utterly unsuited to the needs of the community as to make it well-nigh impossible honestly to develop the coal-fields. They were constructed on the theory that the average home-maker who wanted to make his livelihood out of coal in Alaska needed the kind of legislation suited to the man who fifty years ago made money out of a farm in Iowa or Illinois; and, as the conditions bore no resemblance to one another, the law naturally broke down in its working. With such laws in existence there were only two methods of developing Alaskan resources, one being to change the laws, the other to violate them. Certain great syndicates showed that they much preferred the latter plan. They preferred a bad law to a good law, for they wished an unchecked hand, and by their control over a large portion of the press they hoped to create a sentiment so favorable to the immediate development of Alaska, and so bitter against any attempt to enforce the existing law, as to make the Government sanction their wrongdoing. During the two years preceding last March and the incoming of Mr. Fisher, the Interior Department,

in effect, sided with those great capitalists who wished to "develop" Alaska by making enormous fortunes for themselves outside of and in defiance of the law. A reading of the newspaper comments on the final decision in the Cunningham claims makes it evident that a number of good people who do not think very deeply, and who feel that Alaska ought to be developed at once, are inclined to follow the able and unscrupulous men who denounce as an obstacle to improvement every law designed to protect the rights of the people as a whole and every official who honestly and fearlessly enforces the law. If the decision in the Cunningham claims had not finally gone the way it did, the result would have been a triumph for the very worst kinds of special interest and the greatest possible setback to decency. Let it be remembered that for these two years that have passed the responsibility for keeping the situation as it is rests with the great syndicates in question and their supporters and adherents in public and in private life. Had these men abandoned the effort to secure special privileges and illegal favors to which they had not one shadow of claim, they doubtless would have succeeded in securing the proper amendment of the Alaska coal laws. The responsibility for the delay in the development of Alaska hitherto lies solely at their doors.

To show how completely the responsibility for retarding the development of Alaska is due to syndicates like that of the Guggenheims and their apologists and backers for the last two years in public and in private life, it is only necessary to compare the course of events during these two years with the previous course of the Government in this matter under Secretaries of the Interior Hitchcock and Garfield at the time when Mr. Pinchot was the head of the Forest Service. In 1906, when, on the recommendation of Secretary Hitchcock, the first withdrawal of the coal lands of Alaska was made, the effort to open the lands of Alaska to immediate development under a leasing system of coal lands was begun by those then in authority. In 1907, in various public documents, including a Message of the President to the Congress, the absurdity of the existing laws was clearly set

forth, and Congress was urged to make development easy by the immediate opening of the coal lands under a system which should provide for their disposal and development with proper safeguards for the public. (The foremost advocates of Conservation have never ceased from that day to this the effort to secure the opening of these coal lands under proper conditions, and the chief obstacle in the way has been the attitude of the men in public and in private life who have been bent upon preventing any development of Alaska unless it could take the shape of a development through great lawbreaking syndicates who sought absolute monopolistic control of the coal-fields, and who, provided they could thereby achieve this purpose, were equally willing to violate the existing laws and to prevent the enactment of better laws.) Prior to that time, I, as President, had established a Public Land Commission (one of the commissions, established purely in the interests of the people as a whole, which Congress sought to declare illegal, and which it actually did succeed in finally having abolished, although they were perfectly legal). This Commission consisted of the then head of the Land Office, Mr. Richards, of Mr. Newell, and of Mr. Pinchot. The work of this Commission was adopted by Secretary Garfield as the policy of the Interior Department. There was no let-up in this policy, and it did not come to fruition simply because Congress refused to pass the necessary legislation; a refusal which could be in the interest only of the great syndicates. I wish to make this point perfectly clear. The then Secretary of the Interior, the then Chief of the Forest Service, the then Chief of the Reclamation Service, and their associates who were and are the leaders in the great movement for Conservation, warred steadily for the development of Alaska, and at the same time insisted that this development should take place in such shape as to be a development in the interests of the settlers of Alaska and in the interests of the people of the United States, and not in the interests of the Guggenheim Syndicate or of any other syndicate. In this connection I wish also to call attention to the essen-

tial fact as regards the Controller Bay situation. Controller Bay, under actual conditions, offers the only chance, or, at any rate, very much the best chance, for a free outlet from the great Bering River coal-fields. It was the imperative duty of the Government service to keep this outlet free and not to dispose of it to any individual or individuals. The Government should have held this land in perpetuity, permitting its use by any individual or corporation only under conditions that would subserve the general public interest. Unfortunately, the Interior Department last October eliminated from the Government reserve, not only the 320 acres the elimination of which was mistakenly recommended by the Agricultural Department, but 12,800 acres. Whether there was or was not impropriety in the way in which the elimination was brought about, whether or not there was impropriety in the action which resulted in the instant filing of claims by Mr. Ryan and others, does not go to the root of the matter. The root of the matter is that no such elimination should have been made by the Interior Department. (The public interest demanded that this land should be kept under public control, and that to prevent monopoly its use should be permitted only under such conditions as the public need required.) Remember always that such action would not have hindered development; it would have favored development, for it would have enabled any honest corporation to come in and do its part in developing the country without fear of being crowded out by some other corporation, which, through unwise Government action, might obtain a monopolistic right. It is absolutely essential that terminal facilities shall be on free territory. This is essential to the proper development of our waterways within the United States, and it is essential to the proper development of the Alaska coal-fields.

Congress, unless it is derelict in its duty, should proceed, without delay, to pass some such law as, while preserving absolutely the Government's control and its power to guarantee the rights of the people, will offer a sufficient premium to make it worth while for big moneyed

concerns to develop the coal-fields. Alaska is now filled with pioneers of the same vigorous, restless, thrusting type as those who, in the present generation or in the generation preceding, laid the foundations of all our newer States. These men have a right to demand that the country in which they live be thrown open to development, and therefore to settlement; and the Nation has a keen interest in the development, because the coal is needed for our fleets in the Pacific. I believe that these settlers welcome Governmental action which insists upon the development being honest and being in the interest of the actual settler and home-maker. But they will not permanently acquiesce in legislation which puts a stop to all development. Men who are as far-sighted as they are unscrupulous, and who wish to see the illegal development of the coal-fields by lawbreaking syndicates of great wealth, count upon this feeling among the Alaskans and the people of the Northwest, and therefore desire that no new law shall be passed; for if there is no new legislation, they feel sure that in the end, by hook or by crook, the great syndicates will be able to have their way under the present system. Therefore, without one hour's delay, Congress should proceed to pass the laws demanded by the situation. One prime necessity in passing these laws is that sincere and honest reformers shall remember that the great coal-fields can be developed only by big corporations, and that big corporations will not and ought not to undertake such a business unless they are to

have adequate profits. The aim should not be to prevent big corporations from working or to prevent them from getting adequate profits; the aim should be to give the corporation full opportunity and a chance of ample reward, but to keep such complete control over it as to insure that the reward, though ample, shall not be utterly unreasonable, and shall represent honest work honestly done, and also to see, by the adoption in some shape of the leasing system, that the interests of all of our people are effectively guarded. It is well to remember that the Congressman who, under pretense of hostility to the corporations, declines to permit the passage of legislation which will enable them to do their work honestly and to develop the coal-fields with a fair profit to themselves, while doing justice to others, is not only an enemy to the development of Alaska, but is playing into the hands of the great crooked syndicates who find among their most efficient allies, not merely the corrupt man in public life, but the impracticable person who, in the name of reform, wars against the only methods that will adequately control or check corruption. { Alaska must be developed. It must not be developed through the Government's conniving at lawbreaking on a gigantic scale by great corporations. It must be developed by securing at once the passage of laws which will give to honest corporations an honest profit for doing the work of development. If Congress fails at once to deal with this matter, it will be guilty of criminal negligence.