

Noah D. Alper's Brief Cases

IS THE AIR THINE, MINE OR OURS?

Walter Lippmann, writer and thinker, based on his present information, came up with the comment in his January 6th column, that there is "hope in non-commercial TV." As a one-time Socialist-plus, now improved to a Socialist-minus, he thinks that what is needed is competition.

Commenting on "the law approach" of Attorney General Rogers, Mr. Lippmann says: "there is more in the laws than that. The rights to use the comparatively few air waves are valuable property. Those properties belong to the public, and the intent of the existing law is that licensees to use the air waves are pledged to treat them as a public trust in the public interest."

One is tempted to tell him there is much more to be said about what belongs to the people and what is a public trust.

"The best discussion of this question," he continued, "comes from John Fischer, writing in Harper's Magazine. His thesis is that since the air waves are public property, the government should charge rentals for them. This is quite feasible, since the profits are large. Moreover, rentals could be charged not only in money which would finance the non-commercial company but also in the form of time set aside for it on the commercial networks."

The sales price of air waves shows how little they are considered to be a public trust. Only economic education on a wide scale can reveal the answer to the great property question: what can be mine and thine, and what must be ours.

AS PIONEERS THEY WORKED HARD

"A Seattle woman found a fortune through the picture window of her home. The window in Mrs. Delia Frolich Whatmore's home commands a sweeping view across Lake Washington and a large hill on the east shore. She has just sold 384 acres there for \$1,430,000. It cost her less than \$3,000."

In 1937, Mrs. Whatmore's son remarked that the country across Lake Washington would be a nice place for a summer home. Looking it over, they bought 160 acres from the Weyerhaeuser Timber Company. Later, she paid \$970 for 200 acres of tax-title land, and got the remainder for \$500.

"Then came a floating bridge against the lake. The area was opened to real estate development and in recent years there has been large population growth. The 384 acres will become part of a 1000-acre, 120 million dollar residential and commercial development."

Will the difference between earning and getting wealth, within the law, ever be found out—with economic education as it is?

BLIGHT AND UPSIDE-DOWN ASSESSMENTS

An examination of buildings in downtown St. Louis shows that at least 75 per cent of them are blight-bitten—most of them severely. About one such property, Director of Public Safety, Joseph P. Sestic, stated, "The city is well aware of the blighting effect this building exerts on this fine section, but nothing legally can be done about it."

"Taxes, more than anything else, will force some redevelopment of that corner," declared a St. Louis attorney, seeking this land for an eastern client. "On the basis of assessed valuation the city's tax collector thinks ten times more about the ground than he does about the empty corner building at Sixth and Washington."

Tax books list the ground at \$228,000 and improvements at only \$21,000 covering 40 running feet of the five-story structure. Another 30-foot adjoining section has ground valued at \$54,000 and improvements at \$17,000. On this assessment basis the corner lot was estimated as being worth \$5,600 a running foot.

And who has the key to this mystery? Not the city officials—not the newspapers. Who, but the Henry George School?