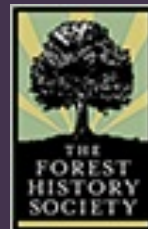


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Franklin K. Lane

The Letters of Franklin K. Lane (1922)

incidents. Olson writes, without substantiation, that Lane supported the 160-acre law on reclamation projects, which limited landowners to receiving federally subsidized water for a quarter section. There is little evidence, however, that Lane took much interest in acreage limitation. He removed Frederick Newell, a supporter of the 160-acre law, as head of the Reclamation Service. Moreover, a key ruling handed down in 1914 made possible widespread evasion of the distributive principle.

Lane's endorsement of disputed private claims to mineral rights within the Elk Hills naval oil reserve has drawn particular criticism. Attorney General Thomas Gregory and Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels saw little merit in the claims, and President Wilson reversed Lane's ruling. Olson introduces no new evidence to modify the views of Lane's detractors. He contends that the secretary showed "a broad assessment of the oil situation" (p. 118)—in other words, that his actions were of a piece with his desire to stimulate development. This was probably true. But it misses the central issue: who would benefit from development? Lane consistently favored the big oil companies. He dismissed Daniels's intriguing, if doomed, idea to have the government produce oil in the reserves. The Californian became one of the chief enthusiasts for what has been termed "an aggressive American oil policy abroad" after World War I. That policy entailed government support of large firms, through tax write-offs and the like, much as some private interests profited handsomely from the public domain while paying the government very nominal royalties. (Lane furthered these policies from the other side of the street after his resignation in 1920. He accepted the \$50,000-a-year vice-presidency of two notorious American oil companies in Mexico that were owned by Edward Doheny, one of the principals in the Teapot Dome scandal.)

Olson finds that Lane's policies, and progressive conservation generally, culminated in the Water Power and General Leasing acts of 1920. As Hays pointed out, however, the Water Power Act, by rejecting multiple-purpose development, "constituted a defeat and marked the end of a conservation era" (*Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*, p. 240). Olson ignores the multiple-purpose concept. Both laws eschewed development of resources by the public sector and, instead of attempting any distribution of public resources, largely supported the profit-making activities of large economic interests. Such approaches yielded one of the bitterest ironies for both development and democracy: a private utility, the Pacific Gas and Electric Company, gained control of the federally generated electricity at Hetch Hetchy and sold it at a substantial profit to San Francisco.

Lane's policies thus seem to fit the pattern of many procorporate progressives. He wanted the federal government to preserve wilderness, so long as convenient; but most of all he wanted the federal government to expand economic capacity, to rationalize the exploitation of natural resources, and to insure that private interests (often those already benefiting from federal policy) would make a profit from public resources. His successors in the 1920s — and many later secretaries of the interior — pursued similar policies under the protean rubric "development and democracy." That being the case, Franklin K. Lane may suggest something prototypical about the relationship between public and private interests in natural resources policy.

CLAYTON R. KOPPE

Mr. Koppes, assistant professor of history and chairman of the Environmental Studies Program at Oberlin College in Ohio, specializes in the history of natural resources policy and American liberalism. He is the author, most recently, of "Public Water, Private Land: Origins of the Acreage Limitation Controversy, 1933-1953," *Pacific Historical Review* (November 1978), an outgrowth of his Ph.D. dissertation on Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman.

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