

JANUARY 20, 1972

Controversy has arisen out west over whether to turn part of the Big Bend National Park into a Wilderness Area. Westerners are excited about the matter. Ranchers everywhere are suspicious of Wilderness Area programs. Shortgrassers have been worrying for 10 years that plans were underway to empty their homeland of the people and the fixtures. The new trailer laws passed last year caused sufficient uneasiness. When unbraked and unlighted homemade trailers became illegal, some parties began to think that perhaps our last means of escape was being cutoff. Previously, we all figured that we could load up what we had left in the trailer, and move on. Now nobody is sure how we will get away.

Further unrest resulted from the court's recent ruling that property tax was an unconstitutional means of financing the school systems. Feelings were that the courts were aware of the condition of the ranch populace and considered us as an unsound tax base.

Their honors, I think, figured that the coyotes were going to eat up all the sheep, federal taxes were going to chew up all the land and cow money, and the school districts were going to be left holding a sack that wouldn't do for a snipe hunt.

Citizens think that judges read nothing but law books and gavel catalogs. That isn't true. The modern jurist has to keep busy to stay current on how fast the constitution is becoming unconstitutional. One week's vacation from the bench could cause a 1972 magistrate to miss the news that the Bill of Rights had been changed to a set of temporary rules.

Judges have to do a lot of fast thinking in this age. Any old fellow who thinks he can take a bench nap is apt to wake up with his corpus-somewhat overruled for the idea of some hombre who has learned to make enough noise in the streets to change the whole foundation of our system.

Declaring the property tax unconstitutional isn't actually going to hurt us herders. The worst that can happen is that our tax burden will be tripled and our voice in local affairs will be ended. School districts ruled by cities have already perfected that method of justice. Redistricting and reevaluating has already tempered most rural sections for a high jacking of rights and purse that'd make Thomas Jefferson wonder why he wore out all those goose quills writing the foundations of democracy.

The threat of a far removed educational system won't return the dark ages. Standards of education will decrease under state or federal control. But, and this is important, as more dumb heads are graduated, the demand will increase for dumb heads to run the offices of education.

Boards of equalization will certainly be hundreds of miles away from the subjects. But the people can still get together over coffee to complain among themselves. Having a complete upheaval in a hitherto sacred form of government doesn't end the possibility that the victims can't sympathize with each other. Property owners and parents won't be denied the inalienable right of crying and bellyaching to their mind's content. I'd guess the director of education would want it to end there, but howling and crying won't be forbidden as long as it doesn't interrupt the bureaucracy.

Greed for a free way of life keeps ranchers in constant disagreement with centralized government. Herders never are going to fit in the new society. Individual sovereignty is too deeply entrenched in their makeup to give in to the times.

Court rulings or legislative acts contrary to man's previous definition of his rights are going to be hard to sell in the ranch country. I'll say one thing for certain, they sure know how to make their blows count