

# Little Equity Here

By MARY LOU WERNER

Northern Virginia has a \$100,000 encyclopedia at its fingertips, but can't seem to interest people in using it.

The valuable text is the fiscal survey conducted by a committee of the Northern Virginia Regional Planning and Economic Development Commission.

It was completed last December after two years of work, and published in a series of five pamphlets two months ago.

Experts say such a project normally would cost \$100,000 or more, but Northern Virginia's bill has been only \$15,000—including \$10,000 for employment of a research consultant and \$5,000 for printing.

The rest of the work has been gratis by the 25 committee members from Alexandria, Arlington, Fairfax and Falls Church.

But even the prospects of such bargain reading has failed to put the report on the best seller list. Officials in the four jurisdictions show little interest, or inclination, to undertake many of the recommendations.

Perhaps Laszlo C. Ecker-Racz, chairman, put his finger on one reason for this when he wrote in the introduction:

"Some local officials are still inclined to look to Richmond for their cues and there appears to hang over sections of these communities an almost paralyzing dread of displeasing 'the State.'"

## Fiscal Inequity Cited

State and local fiscal relationships rank high among the problems covered by the report.

It is no secret that Richmond has been shortchanging Northern Virginia for years. Nary a political campaign has passed without one candidate—or even all of them—bleating for a fairer share of State revenues in Northern Virginia. There have been a few successful advances in this direction recently.

With the fiscal survey, the area now can cite chapter and verse how much more ought to be coming North—and less going South.

For instance: The four Northern Virginia jurisdictions, representing about one-eighth of the State population, account for roughly one-sixth of the State's tax collections—yet receive only one-sixteenth in return.

Three rural counties cited in the report have a combined population barely a fourth as large as Northern Virginia's. Their share of taxes paid to the State was less than a twentieth of the share paid by Northern Virginia. Yet their slice of cash aid from Richmond was well over half as large as that received by Northern Virginia.

Certainly, it could be expected that a relatively high income area like Northern Virginia would contribute more to State operations than less prosperous sections, but the balance appears unduly tilted.

Rural counties, accustomed to having their way at the State Capitol, aren't going to give up such an advantageous arrangement easily. But the fiscal survey does give Northern Virginia legislators something to beat their down-State colleagues over the head with—and it is not impossible to hope for results.

In 1956, the State changed its method of distributing certain school funds, which brought Northern Virginia additional income.

It was such a clear-cut case of equity that rural legislators didn't have the nerve to fight the change.

## Little 'Home Rule'

The report also discusses the strong grip maintained by the State over local government functions—a system "developed decades ago with a view to State control of rural communities." This, according to Mr. Ecker-Racz, "gives communities little scope to face their problems in their own way."

But there are some problems that the localities can take the initiative to meet, and the fiscal committee hasn't shied from offering advice, even at the risk of tramping on a few important toes.

There have been occasions where two or more Northern Vir-

ginia jurisdictions acted together to meet some problem like sewage disposal, but the report states, in other respects Northern Virginia "is still little more than an aggregation of small communities indifferent to the common needs and problems that bind them together and unreconciled to having grown into metropolitan status."

"Intercommunity consultations are increasing," Mr. Ecker-Racz notes in the introduction, "but such a logical step as joint regional administrations of functions which are essentially regional in character has hardly reached even the discussion stage."

He further warns that "reluctance to recognize the essential unity of the Northern Virginia region can condemn the entire area to the status of an aggregation of shopping centers and deny to it the benefits of an integrated metropolitan entity ideally situated to play a leading role in the economic life of Virginia."

## Facts and Figures

The increasing burden of providing services for Northern Virginia's growing population is discussed in detail. Facts and figures are given, where only generalizations existed before.

Total bonded debt in Northern Virginia amounts to \$100 million—most of it for schools. There has been some Federal aid, but the report warns that this cannot be expected to go on forever.

The familiar complaint that the Federal Government ought to contribute more to the area because Federal activity has brought about so much painful growth gets little sympathy in the report. It is reasoned that Federal activity has brought prosperity as well as problems. Release of Federal land to taxable private use is urged, instead of the more common hand-out-begging.

Some kind of increased consumer tax offers the best hope of new revenue, in the committee's opinion.

A more familiar way of expressing this idea is a sales tax, but every jurisdiction in Northern Virginia doesn't have authority to impose a sales tax. Instead, the committee suggests a business tax high enough that merchants would pass it on to consumers.

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BY EARL H. VOSS

# Khrushch

BUTTER AND MEAT

RUSSIA'S collective farms will

them to say "we need a sales tax but the State won't pass one."

The report points out that a State sales tax would only compound the existing fiscal inequity endured by Northern Virginia. With such a tax, more money would be poured into Richmond from the prosperous northern corner of the State, with less coming back.

A business tax, such as the one proposed by the committee, would leave every dime right in the area where it is collected.

There are many other specific recommendations—some of particular use to one community or another, and some of benefit to the entire area.

But, as the report notes, it is going to take leadership to get some of the ideas off the ground.

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