

P O L I

Water in California is a matter of raw power politics. And if the next drought is a permanent one, it will be a drought of politics rather than of nature.

By JONATHAN KIRSCH

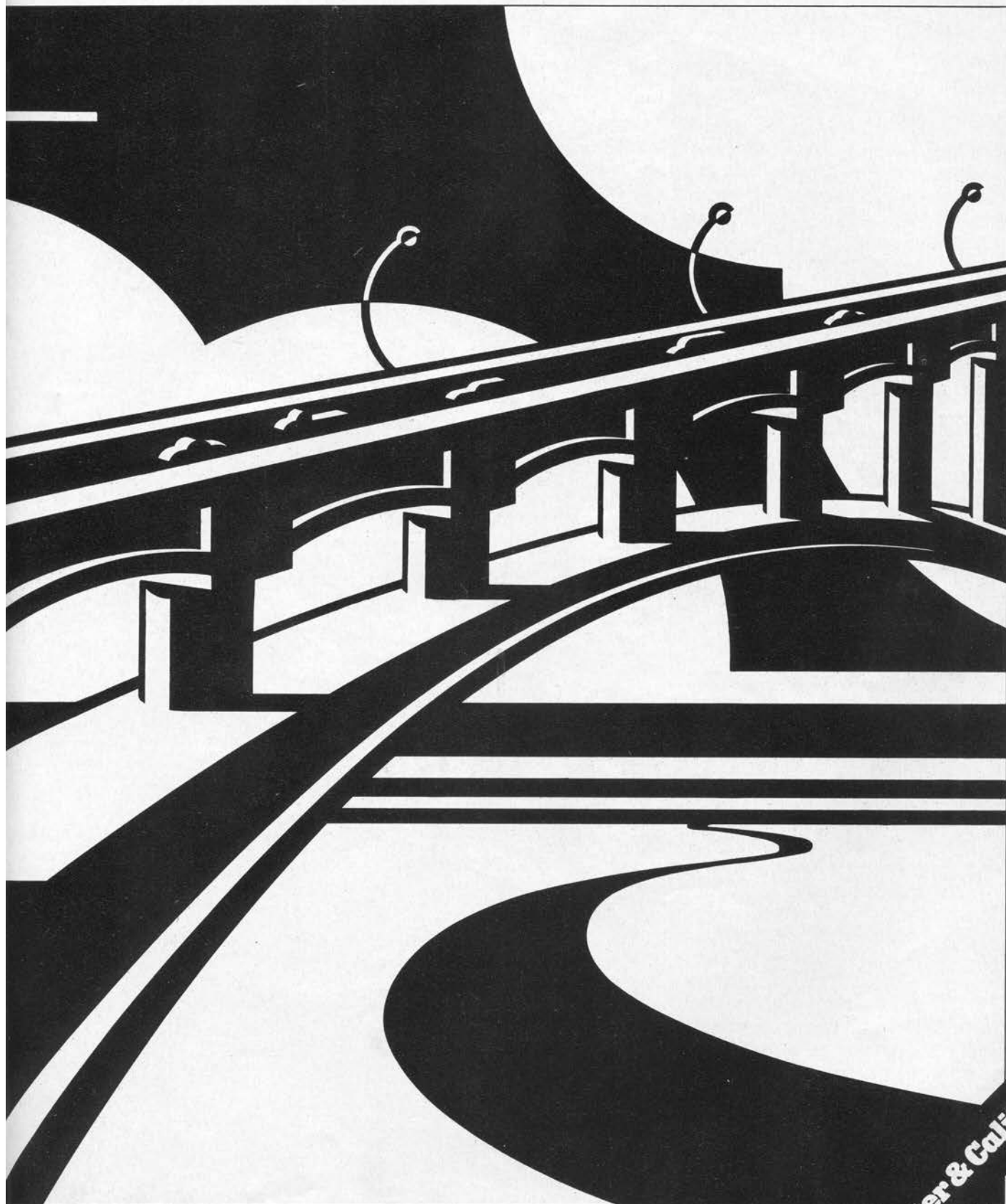
HIGHWAY 49 BETWEEN Sonora and Angel's Camp crosses the Stanislaus River at a place called Parrotts Ferry, where the traveler must choose between two bridges over the rugged river canyon. One is an old wooden structure that spans the white water at a height of twenty feet and promptly dead-ends in a stretch of road that is now used as a parking lot by the rafters who come to run the river. The other is a coldly spectacular concrete-and-steel viaduct, 230 feet high and 640 feet long, the nation's longest segmented, prestressed concrete box-girder span, erected by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as part of the New Melones Dam complex.

These two bridges offer a choice of paths, a set of rival aesthetics, a pair of competing visions of the future of water in California. The farmers who work the land below the New Melones Dam want to fill the reservoir and tap its water and hydroelectric power to expand agricultural production; the rafters who run the nine miles of white water above the dam want to leave it empty and thus preserve the river canyon. It is a deceptively simple question—68 billion gallons of water for irrigation and 300 megawatts of electricity versus nine miles of white water and 90,000

Illustrated By TIM CLARK



T I C S



Water & California

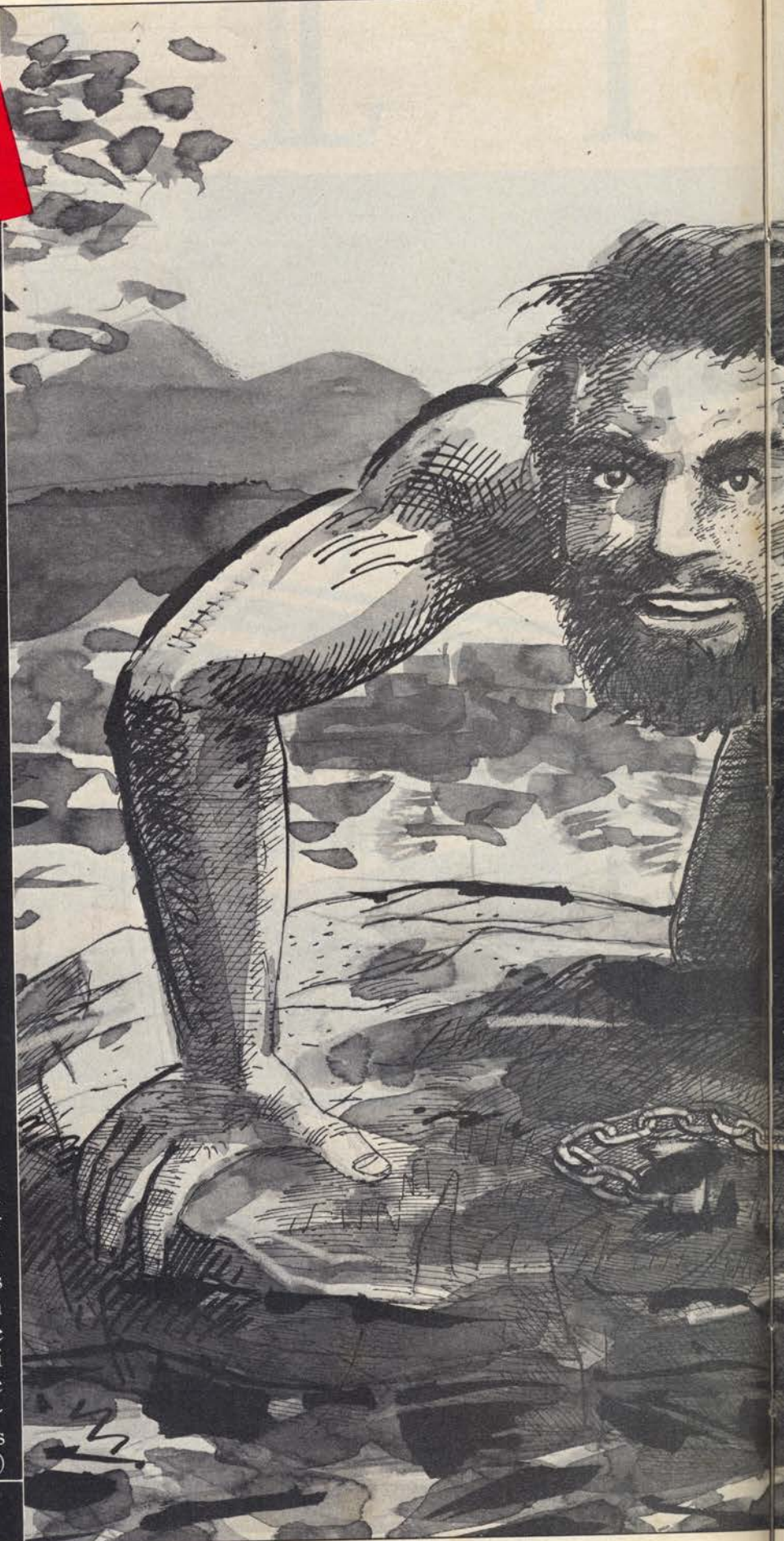
The New Melones Dam offers a set of rival aesthetics, the concrete-worshipers versus the eco-activists, a pair of competing visions of California's future.

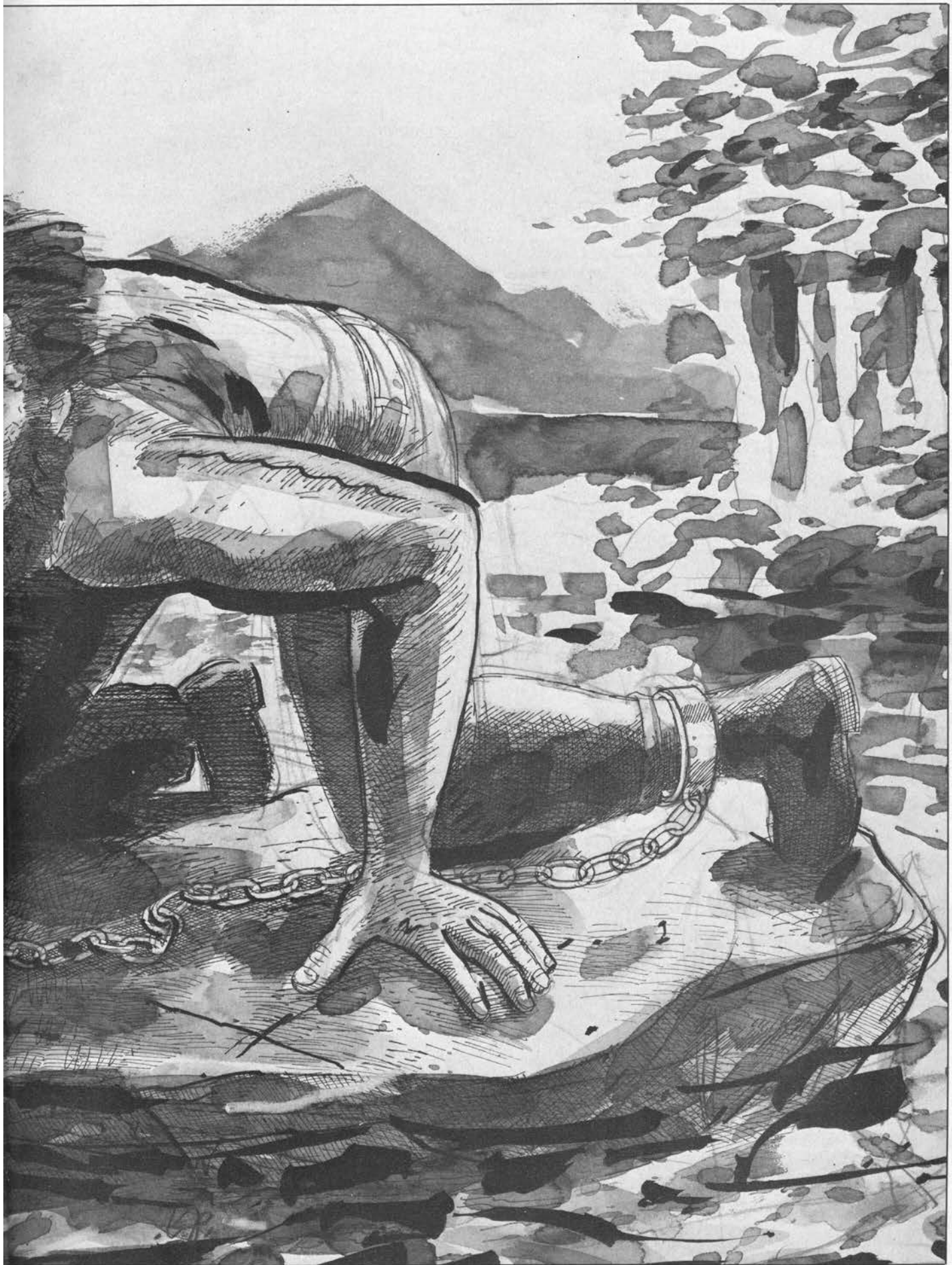
"recreational days" in the river canyon each year—but it continues to bedevil the courts, the legislature and the bureaucracy more than 25 years after the New Melones project was first authorized.

Last May, a young man named Mark Dubois—a river rat turned eco-activist—managed to reduce the question to one of morality rather than water policy. The Corps of Engineers, which remains under a disputed state order against filling the reservoir behind New Melones Dam, decided to raise the water level high enough to test the turbines of the hydroelectric plant—and just high enough to threaten Parrotts Ferry and the lower stretch of white water. Dubois, who knows his temporary restraining orders as well as the next Friend of the River, chained himself to a rock somewhere along the water's edge and dared the corps to flood Parrotts Ferry at the cost of his own life. "The magic of this canyon," he declared in a letter of protest to the corps, "should prohibit us from committing the unconscionable act of wiping this place off the face of the earth."

On the macadam surface of the old wooden bridge at Parrotts Ferry is a remnant of those days of rage when the Friends of the River were waiting to see if the corps was ruthless enough to drown Mark Dubois. It is an elaborate work of black spray-paint graffiti that lists the rivers that rise in the Sierra Nevada and repeats the simple moral equation that Dubois had imposed (Continued on page 63)

Illustrated By GARY PANTER





(Continued from page 51)
on the New Melones controversy:

FEATHER
YUBA
AMERICAN
MOKELUMNE
RUBICON
COSUMNES
STANISLAUS
TUOLUMNE
MERCED
KINGS
KERN
WHAT'S LEFT OF THESE
WILL ALSO DIE: BURIED BY
THE CONCRETE WORSHIPERS
IF WE DON'T STOP THEM HERE.
PARROTTS FERRY IS THE LIMIT!

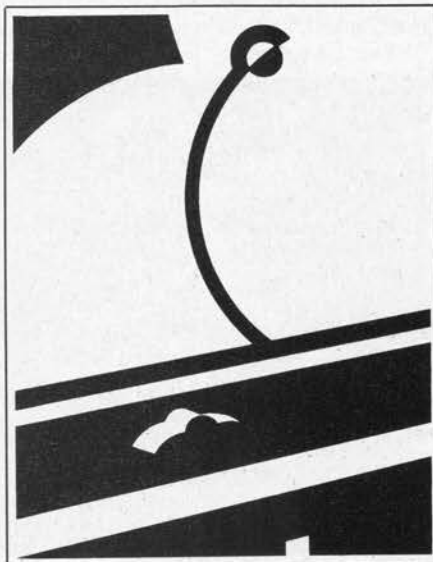
As Mark Dubois knew all along, the simple moral equation has a simple solution: Jerry Brown sent a suitably outraged telegram to Jimmy Carter, the corps released enough water from the reservoir to keep Dubois from drowning himself, and Parrotts Ferry was saved for the moment. But only for the moment. The harder question remains: Do we need the New Melones Dam more than we need nine miles of white water on the Stanislaus? The litigation and lobbying continue, and it will be law and politics—rather than guerrilla theater—that will answer the question.

Of course, it is a question that must be answered not only for the New Melones Dam—a rather puny dam as such things go—but for all of California's vast system of water development. Today, we are facing a crisis in our supply of water that is potentially far more devastating than the current energy crisis or the last drought. Both the State Water Project and the federal Central Valley Project—the two huge feats of civic ambition and civil engineering that literally created the state of California out of chaparral, salt flats and marshlands—are stalled and stagnating. In the next decade, our supply of water from groundwater pumping, the Owens Valley and the Colorado River may be sharply reduced or even wiped out. And the worst-possible-case scenarios in Sacramento envision the next drought as a permanent one—a chronic shortage of water that will begin in 1985 or 1990 or 2000, depending on whose bad news you're hearing, and continue until water is so precious and so expensive that we cannot afford to leave a wild river undammed.

In the next drought, a brick in the toilet and a brown front lawn will not be our only sacrifices; the cost must be measured in lost jobs, inflated food prices and strict water rationing. But the crisis may still be far enough in the future to allow us a few years of preparation to soften its impact or even to avoid it entirely. Conservation, reclamation and groundwater management are the soft technologies that the environmentalists offer as the basis for one alternate future of water development. The peripheral canal, the

damming of the Eel River and the heightening of Shasta Dam are the set of alternatives favored by the "concrete-worshippers." The thirstiest visionaries look to the Columbia River or even the Yukon for water in the next century.

The options are clear. The hardware is on the shelf, and the money is in the bank. What is lacking is the willingness of the decision-makers to choose. Water development in California today is defined by a stalemate that has nothing to do with the moral question of damming a wild river or the technical question of choosing the peripheral canal over the heightening of Shasta Dam. It is a matter of raw power politics, and moralists like Mark Dubois are far less consequential than the politicians who would be gover-



nor: Assembly Speaker Leo McCarthy, Fresno State Senator Ken Maddy, senate Republican leader Bill Campbell. They are politicians whose gubernatorial ambitions may have gotten in the way of a workable water policy for California.

McCarthy, for instance, supports the controversy-ridden peripheral canal—but he insists that it must be linked to an equally controversial program of groundwater management, which would limit how much water a farmer can pump from his own land. Groundwater management is "World War Four for farmers," warns Ken Maddy, who also supports the canal but insists that it must be linked to the removal of the Eel River from the protective embrace of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. And Bill Campbell, whose flirtation with Central Valley agribusiness is the subject of lurid speculation within the water lobby, insists that the peripheral canal should not be built at all.

"Well," says Contra Costa Democratic Congressman George Miller, a fierce opponent of the peripheral canal, "there are no politics like water politics." All the pronouncements and maneuverings of McCarthy and Maddy and Campbell might make for good water politics, but they add little to a sound water policy in

California. Rather, they define a political deadlock that has paralyzed the making of a water policy. If the next drought is permanent, it will be a drought caused by politics rather than by nature.

THE CONCRETE-WORSHIPERS

among us see no contradiction in the fact that two thirds of California's water is found north of the Tehachapis while two thirds of the people are found to the south. They see no irony in the fact that the agricultural abundance of the Central Valley and the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta—no less than Southern California's much maligned suburban sprawl—owes its existence to the man-made system of dams and aqueducts and pumping stations that take water, in the words of one lobbyist for what is appropriately called the water industry, "from where it is to where it ain't." And they see nothing but grandeur in the graceful curve of a concrete arch dam, the bold reach of a 450-mile-long aqueduct, and the mighty thrust of a pumping station that pushes water 2,000 feet over the Tehachapis in a single lift.

"Asking if you're for or against water development," shrugs William Kahrl, a former member of the Brown administration brain trust and the editor of the new *California Water Atlas* (see page 60), "is like asking if you're for or against the idea of California."

The politics of water in California—and therefore the *idea* of California—were defined from the start by the concrete-worshippers, the bankers and the land barons, the newspaper publishers and the railroad magnates, the developers and the promoters who changed the name of the Colorado Desert to "Imperial Valley" and thereby invented California dreamin'. When the godfathers of water didn't have the votes, they had the money to buy them; when they didn't have the law, they had the lawyers and the legislators to change it. Water politics were tough, often brutal, sometimes dirty, and until recently the water industry always succeeded in taking water from where it is to where it ain't.

If the politics of water were brutal, the rewards were bountiful, even miraculous. And the greening of the Southern California suburbs is the least remarkable result. Much of the Central Valley, where three quarters of California's croplands are located, consisted of alkali flats, marshlands and prairie grasslands until irrigation water turned it into the most productive farming region in the world. California has been the nation's leading agricultural state for the last 25 years, with more irrigated land, a greater variety of produce, and a near monopoly in some seventeen crops, including lettuce, grapes, apricots, lemons, olives, almonds, figs, dates, avocados and garlic. Agriculture is a booming \$10 billion-a-year industry—the largest in the California economy—and it feeds another \$18 bil-

lion a year into the economy in the form of food processing, transportation and marketing.

The crucial role of agriculture in water development—and thus in the politics of water—was the best-kept secret of the 1976–1977 drought. The agit-prop of water conservation left the impression that the shortage was caused by some senseless slob in a Southern California suburb—a guy whose tract home wouldn't even be there if it weren't for the rape of the Owens Valley, a profligate consumer of water who drenched his dichondra, hosed off his sidewalk and flushed his toilet too often. But the conservation effort in the cities and suburbs—except in areas with authentic water shortages like Marin or Contra Costa—was pure symbolism. Eighty-five percent of our people live in the cities, but 85 percent of our water is used on the farm.

That imbalance of supply and demand is the starting point of water politics in California. The thirst of Southern California suburbanites and Central Valley farmers has always been the driving force behind the water axis that seeks to exploit the distant waters of the north coast and the Delta. What the farmers bring to the water axis is money and a certain political clout that lingers after reapportionment; what Southern California brings is vast corporate wealth and raw voter strength. No one north of the Tehachapis forgets that the 1960 bond issue that paid for the ambitious first phase of the State Water Project succeeded only on the strength of Southern California votes; the only Northern California county where the measure passed was Butte County, where the centerpiece of the project—Oroville Dam—was to be constructed.

The water axis seems all the more ominous to the folks on the banks of the northern rivers because of the looming shortages in California's supply of water. The State Water Project is obliged to deliver 4.2 million acre feet of water per year to its big contractors in the south—primarily the Kern County Water Agency and Southern California's mammoth Metropolitan Water District—by the year 2000, but the current system can collect and transport only 2.5 million acre feet per year. The need for those additional 1.7 million acre feet of water has been postponed by the use of water from the Colorado River and the Owens Valley—but California will lose 1 million acre feet per year of Colorado River water in the mid-1980s, when Arizona begins to take its full share of water under a Supreme Court decision. And a court fight over the pumping of Owens Valley water by Los Angeles threatens to put even greater pressure on the State Water Project to find more water for delivery south of the Tehachapis.

The farmers of the Central Valley, who rely on groundwater pumping and cheap

water from the federal Central Valley Project, are facing their own acute shortages in the next decade. Extensive groundwater pumping—which provides 40 percent of the irrigation water in the San Joaquin Valley—has lowered the water table in many areas, thus requiring deeper wells and more energy to pump them while reducing the quality of the water. And the growth of the Central Valley Project, which now delivers more than 4 million acre feet of water per year to farmers, has been stunted by environmental lawsuits and the coolness of the Carter administration toward building more water projects in the West. The New Melones Dam—built at a cost of \$340 million but so far legally unusable—may well be the last addition to the Central Valley Project.

The environmental lobby, which has

FEATHER
YUBA
AMERICAN
MOKELUMNE
RUBICON
COSUMNES
STANISLAUS
TUOLUMNE
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little money and counts on sentiment rather than self-interest to win voter support, has been remarkably successful in countering the will of the water axis over the last ten years. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the state Environmental Quality Act, and other protective legislation are barriers to further water development in California. The inevitable environmental lawsuits, which are filed whenever a shovel is put to the earth, have raised the cost and lengthened the construction schedules of any future dams or aqueducts. And the environmentalists continue to argue that the water crisis is a fraud, that we can live within our existing resources by slowing suburban sprawl and agricultural expansion, that we can save the wild rivers by resorting to conservation, reclamation and groundwater management.

The environmentalists may have succeeded in stopping the concrete-works for the moment, but the \$10-billion agricultural economy and the 13 million people who live south of the Tehachapis still loom large in the politics of water. "Hell, we live in the West," says Bill Kahrl, who worked on wild rivers legislation before joining the Brown administration. "We have certain political realities. One of them is that you don't

beat up on water development. There are people who are saying that, given the political difficulties, the way to deal with the water problem is to start developing plants that use less water. I'm not kidding—there are guys floating around with big grants who are working on waterless instant tomatoes."

Meanwhile, the political adversaries of the water axis—the north coast, where the wild rivers run to the Pacific, and the Delta, where the giant pumps of the State Water Project and the Central Valley Project suck 5.6 million acre feet of water per year—are fearful and defensive. "If the Metropolitan Water District and the Central Valley farmers get together and agree on what they want," says Greg deGiere, administrative assistant to state Senator Barry Keene, "there won't be a whole lot that the rest of the state can do to stop them. It will be like Sherman's march to the sea."

THE MARCH TO THE SEA BEGAN

in 1977 when state Senator Ruben Ayala, a San Bernardino Democrat who chairs the Agriculture and Water Resources Committee, introduced legislation to implement the next phase of the State Water Project. And the march ended in June in a flat political stalemate. What happened in the intervening years of intense political infighting was the splintering of the Southern California–Central Valley axis, the stalling of water development, and the earliest skirmishing among three politicians who want to be governor.

Ayala's original bill, S.B. 346, focused on the so-called peripheral canal—a 43-mile-long, 400-foot-wide, billion-dollar unlined ditch that would take water from the Sacramento River and carry it around the eastern edge of the Sacramento–San Joaquin Delta to the pumping stations at Tracy. It would replace the current method of sending water from the State Water Project's Oroville Dam and the Central Valley Project's Shasta Dam through the Delta's 1,000 miles of serpentine natural channels. It would eliminate the "reverse flows" that suck sea water into the Delta from San Francisco Bay, and thus it would improve the quality of water for both local use and export to the south. It would help restore the Delta fisheries and the waterfowl nesting grounds in the Suisun Marsh, both of which are now being damaged by the velocity and saline content of the reverse flows. And, above all, it would allow the State Water Project and the Central Valley Project to draw an additional million acre feet of water every year without damming a single river.

The bill immediately caught the eye of the governor, who had already endorsed the peripheral canal as the key element in a dreamy \$7 billion water plan that included additional reservoirs in the Sacramento Valley, a canal to deliver water to the San Joaquin Valley, and an in-

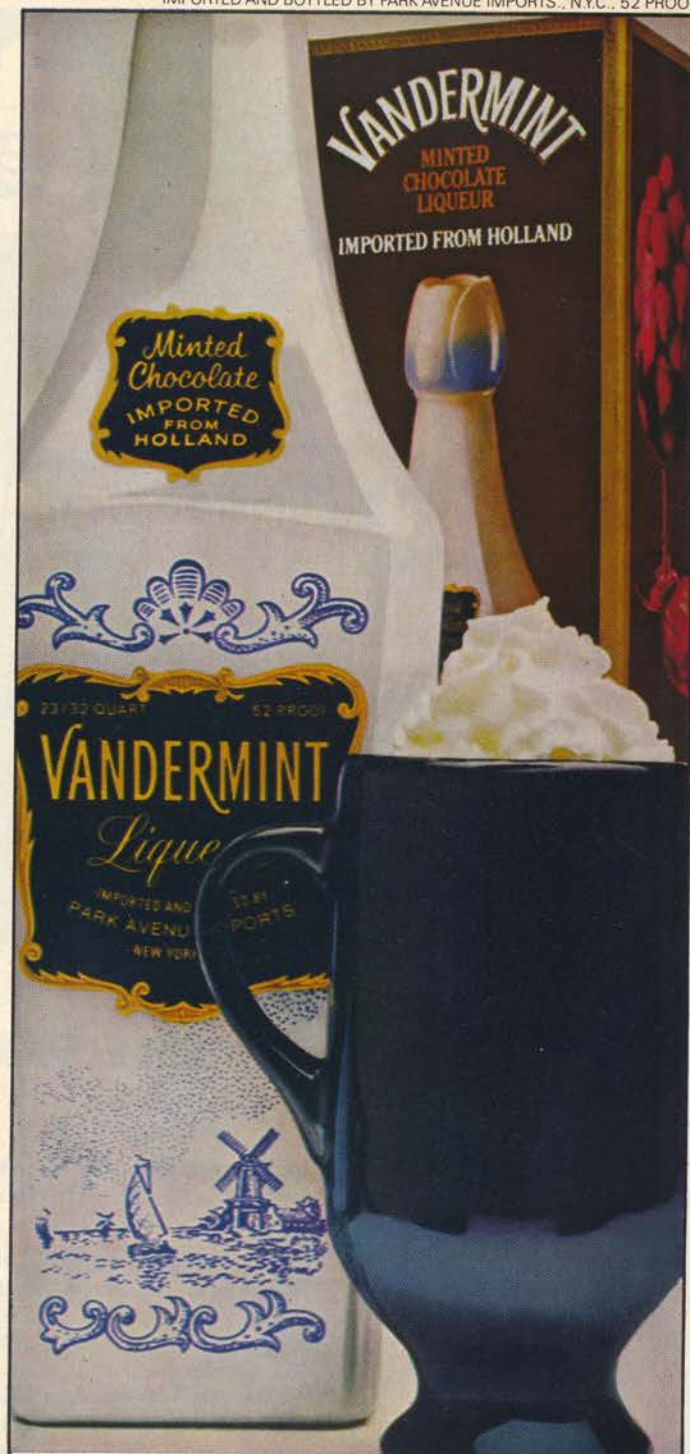
novative program of conservation, reclamation and groundwater management. Jerry Brown was running for re-election, and the peripheral canal would have been a lovely gift to the wealthy agricultural interests who had never forgiven Brown for his chummy relationship with Cesar Chavez. "Brown needed something to give agriculture," says geographer and Friends of the Earth lobbyist Mike Storper, "and what he wanted to give them was water."

Brown borrowed Ayala's bill, which had been a straight \$600 million appropriation to build the peripheral canal, and he began adding a shopping list of water quality assurances, environmental protections and additional water facilities. After a marathon bargaining session in the governor's office, director of water resources Ronald Robie assembled what is now known rather wistfully as "the fragile coalition"—farmers, environmentalists, water agencies and other odd bedfellows who agreed to support the canal.

"Brown could probably gain a lot of points if he could pull off the magic of keeping the environmentalists happy and developing water at the same time," says former Fresno assemblyman and newly elected state Senator Ken Maddy, who was running for the Republican gubernatorial nomination during the fight over S.B. 346. "When he started with the Ayala bill, he thought he had satisfied the Central Valley interests, the Metropolitan Water District, the Sierra Club—but it was such a delicate balance that he started losing it as he went along."

At first, the opposition to S.B. 346 was thoroughly predictable. Delta farmers, who irrigate their land by pumping directly out of the natural channels, have always feared that diverting water through the peripheral canal would leave their land dry and salt-choked. "We don't want to give the Metropolitan Water District the plumbing to suck us dry in a drought year," says Delta attorney Dante Nomellini, who represents the Central Delta Water Agency. And the hard-line environmentalists, who did not share the Sierra Club's belief that S.B. 346 was a good compromise on an inevitable expansion of the State Water Project, warn that the expanded capacity of the peripheral canal would make it easier for the water industry to argue for damming the wild rivers of the north coast. "The peripheral canal is a gun pointed at the head of the Eel," says economist Zach Willey, who testifies on legislation on behalf of the Environmental Defense Fund.

Despite the lobbying efforts of the Delta interests and the environmentalists, S.B. 346 passed the senate and picked up a few more amendments in the assembly. And it picked up something else: a new adversary, a quite remarkable adversary, in the form of the two largest farming operations in the Central Valley, the 65,000-acre Salyer Land Company and



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the 155,000-acre J. G. Boswell Company. Here was something new in water politics; here was the first rupture in the old Southern California-Central Valley water axis; and here was a bit of political intrigue that continues to baffle Sacramento insiders. Suddenly, mysteriously, Salyer and Boswell had joined the Delta farmers and the environmentalists in opposition to the peripheral-canal bill.

"It's a strange and unholy alliance," says environmental lobbyist Lorelle Long, who lobbied against S.B. 346 alongside representatives of the Delta, and Salyer and Boswell. "You always get the feeling that there's a game going on that you can't control." Even a master politician like the speaker of the assembly is uneasy about the new political alignment: "I'll start out by admitting that I don't understand everyone's personal agenda," says San Francisco Democrat Leo McCarthy.

"We would have led the parade for the peripheral canal," admits John Penn Lee, an articulate Virginia tax lawyer (and Salyer son-in-law) who speaks for both Salyer and Boswell on political issues. "I'd gone into the hearings on S.B. 346 believing that the Delta people were the bad guys, that they were greedy, that they were trying to take our water—and I was gradually transformed into believing that they had a damn good point."

But the point, at least for Salyer and Boswell and other farm interests outside the Delta, had less to do with the peripheral-canal project itself than with the other legislative baggage that had been piled on its back by the Brown administration and the assembly. One objectionable amendment required the federal government to join in the construction of the canal—and provided for cancellation of the project if the federal government refused. Another provision required the federal government to authorize its Central Valley Project to meet water quality standards in the Delta. In a drought year, that might mean that water destined for Central Valley farms would be released into the Delta to flush salt water out of the natural channels. Salyer had already gone to court over the use of water for such purposes during the last drought, and now the legislature was proposing to write it into law. And, like other Central Valley growers, Salyer and Boswell feared that the Metropolitan Water District—with its water supply assured by a peripheral canal—would not support future efforts to dam new rivers in the north. Faced with S.B. 346, Salyer and Boswell dropped their traditional support of the peripheral canal and—in a move that mystified the water lobby—endorsed an alternate \$30 million plan for increasing the carrying capacity of the Delta's natural channels.

"I like to think that I'm a good guy and everything," says John Lee, "but one of my ulterior motives was that I knew that the Delta had certain vested water

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rights—and I knew we did, too—and if the Delta was fair game, then I figured that we could be fair game, too.” And so Salyer and Boswell defected from the old Southern California—Central Valley water axis that the Metropolitan Water District had struggled so hard to keep intact. “We don’t have the political clout to take water from plants in the Delta and pour it on plants in the Valley,” says Lee. “But Southern California has the political clout to take water away from plants and give it to people. And if there’s another drought, and there’s a question of whether it’s going to be the plants or the people, you know what’s going to happen.”

Some Sacramento veterans believe that Salyer and Boswell have other ulterior motives, too. The biggest threat to Central Valley agribusiness is the proposed enforcement of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation’s 160-acre rule, a rule that would deny cheap federal water to landholders with more than 160 acres and thus would break up the giant corporate farms. One of the leading advocates of the 160-acre rule is the outspoken Democratic congressman from Contra Costa, George Miller. And Miller is just as outspoken in his opposition to the peripheral canal. According to the conspiracy theory of water politics, Salyer and Boswell are horse-trading: They’ll support the Delta on the peripheral canal, and the Delta farm interests will put pressure on Miller to change his position on the 160-acre rule. And if Miller cannot be persuaded to change his mind, he can always be challenged by a candidate with strong farm support in the next election. John Lee denies that Salyer and Boswell are trying to pressure Miller on the 160-acre rule, but one water lobbyist says: “Well, I can’t say that you don’t keep an eye on George Miller.”

Another theory favored by the environmentalists suggests that Salyer and Boswell are not opposed to the peripheral canal at all; they are simply sabotaging the current legislative efforts in the hope of getting a more favorable bill with fewer environmental provisions. “If they wait a couple of years, they’ll create a panic and get a bill without safeguards,” says Mike Storper of Friends of the Earth. “In other words, a carte blanche to transfer water all over the state.”

Even more sinister motives are suggested by Assemblyman Lawrence Kapiloff, a San Diego Democrat who serves as chairman of the Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee. Kapiloff, who is carrying a pioneering groundwater management bill that would impose limits on groundwater pumping, believes that Salyer and Boswell want to postpone the peripheral canal and thus allow the groundwater table in the Central Valley to drop even lower. With rising fuel costs and deeper wells, only large corporate farmers could afford to pump water in the Central Valley. “It’s almost out of a grade B movie,” says Kapiloff. “You have

the guys in the black hats—Salyer and Boswell—wanting to control the water within a valley, and you have all the little farmers screaming and yelling about. It’s the big guys like Salyer and Boswell who will benefit by bringing the water table down so far that they’ll drive the competition out.”

But the most sinister theory, the most significant and politically telling theory, focuses on the peculiar relationship between Salyer and Boswell and a Southern California state senator who is acting more and more like a candidate for governor—Republican floor leader William Campbell of Hacienda Heights. The Metropolitan Water District lobbied Campbell hard in favor of S.B. 346. Salyer and Boswell lobbied Campbell against it. By all political wisdom, it was the Met that should have secured his vote. After all, Campbell is from Southern California—and Southern California votes for water. But when S.B. 346 returned to the senate for a concurring vote on assembly amendments, Bill Campbell voted against it—and the peripheral canal was dead.

THE WATER LOBBY IS WONDERING out loud about the Campbell vote on the peripheral canal. Not all of the speculation looks for sinister motives. After all, the floor fight over S.B. 346 took place in the heat of the 1978 gubernatorial campaign, and the Southern California senators who voted against it—including John Briggs of Fullerton and George Deukmejian of Long Beach—may have been unwilling to give Jerry Brown’s platform a new water plank. The senate vote took place during the Jarvis backlash, and the Republican senators insist that they were unwilling to spend a billion dollars on the peripheral canal when the Delta’s alternate plan was being offered at a fraction of the cost. But the smart money in the water lobby is betting on a deal between Campbell, the gubernatorial hopeful, and Salyer and Boswell, the free-spending political contributors.

“A lot of people say that Salyer and Boswell bought Campbell and Briggs off,” says farmer-turned-lobbyist Bill DuBois, who represents the California Farm Bureau Federation. “But I prefer to believe that each of the senators has a personal conviction that there’s a cheaper way to solve the water problem. It’s absolutely essential that you give those senators credit for being politically and intellectually honest. And I don’t take the position that Salyer and Boswell or the Delta water agencies or anybody else bought them off.”

Other insiders are less charitable about the political innocence of Bill Campbell’s vote on the peripheral canal. “I can’t prove it,” says Larry Kapiloff, “but I’ve been told by a competent political source that Bill Campbell is going to control the largest political slush fund in California

going into the eighties. I've been told that this would allow Campbell to gain greater stature in the legislature by controlling political contributions, directing where they went, securing his own party's nomination for governor in 1982. I think that it all holds together. And I think that he will be primarily funded by Salyer and Boswell and some of the Delta people."

So far, the charges remain plausible but unproven, and both Campbell and Salyer and Boswell deny the existence of a slush fund or a deal on the peripheral canal. "My primary goal is the rapid delivery of new and desperately needed water to Southern California," Campbell states. "I voted against the peripheral canal because it is too expensive, it will not guarantee the amount of water its supporters suggest, and it will be delayed by lengthy and complicated legal challenges. And there may be a cheaper and less controversial alternative."

"Our lobbying effort on S.B. 346 went on with just about everyone we could get our hands on, and we just happened to be successful with Bill Campbell," insists Salyer attorney John Lee. "I'm certain that he would seek political contributions from wherever he could, and certainly he would have as much right as anybody else to ask us to help him. I think he'd make a hell of a good governor. But I can absolutely assure you that no deal has been struck. I've heard the story that we've created a slush fund for his gubernatorial race—and it just ain't so."

If the courting of Bill Campbell by Salyer and Boswell has been less sinister than Larry Kapiloff believes, it has also been more subtle than John Lee implies. Even before the fight over S.B. 346, Salyer and Boswell asked Campbell to sponsor a controversial measure that would have removed the Eel River from the protection of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and allowed development of its waters for export. "That would get enough water down here to take care of everyone's gripe, and then we wouldn't have to worry about how to get it across the Delta," explains Lee. "So we got Senator Campbell, we worked him hard, and we finally convinced him that we were right, and we got him to introduce a bill that would develop the Eel."

Salyer and Boswell paid \$1,250 for a table at a fund-raising dinner for Campbell in Newport Beach last year. And they may have attempted to indirectly assist Campbell's prospective gubernatorial candidacy by declining to help another potential Republican candidate, Ken Maddy. Although Salyer had contributed \$25,000 to Maddy's unsuccessful Republican gubernatorial primary campaign in 1977, neither Salyer nor Boswell contributed to his expensive state senate race against Modesto Democratic Assemblyman John Thurman last spring. "Both guys were good candidates," shrugs Lee. "Thurman sort of caught us

first, and so there we were."

The working relationship between the senator from Los Angeles and the farmers from the Central Valley was still very much alive last June, when Senator Ruben Ayala's revived peripheral-canal legislation reached the senate Finance Committee in the form of S.B. 200. Ayala had removed the controversial provision that required federal participation in the project, and he was hopeful that the administration-backed bill would succeed on the second try. After all, the earlier bill had won committee approval and floor votes in both houses; it had been defeated only in a last-minute floor fight over concurrence with assembly amendments, and that could be explained away by the partisan opposition of Southern



California Republicans in the heat of an election year. But when S.B. 200 came up for a vote in the senate Finance Committee, it was promptly voted down. Lobbying against the new peripheral-canal bill were Salyer and Boswell, and voting against it was Bill Campbell.

"THE BLOODY GODDAMN PERIPHERAL canal is like a bloody goddamn religion in California!" hisses one water lobbyist, wearily, angrily. "Either you're for the bloody goddamn thing or you're against it."

Ruben Ayala is angry, too, and he is talking about sponsoring an initiative to put the canal on the 1980 ballot. "I think it's only right to let the people of California decide," he says. "I'm not going to let one individual like Mr. Campbell stop it. Why should the people of California be held up because of one legislator who has political ambitions?"

But Bill Campbell is not the only man in Sacramento with political ambitions, and the political stalemate over water development goes beyond one senator's negative vote on the peripheral canal. Ken Maddy, for instance, refuses to support the canal unless the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is amended to allow immediate consideration of the Eel River for water development. "Give me the Eel," he once told Jerry Brown after helping to kill S.B. 346 on the senate floor, "and

you'll get the canal."

Leo McCarthy, on the other hand, has vowed that no peripheral-canal legislation will clear the assembly without an accompanying bill to impose groundwater management regulations on agriculture. "We always talk about planning for water needs for the next generation, but we never do a damn thing about it," he says. "If we go ahead with water development without making an effort on some serious water conservation, water reclamation and groundwater management, then we're damn fools."

Barry Keene, the Democratic state senator from Elk, has introduced nothing less than a constitutional amendment to prohibit the damming of the Eel River without the approval of the four counties through which it runs. "If the supporters of the peripheral canal are sincere when they say it won't be used to transport Eel River water south, let them prove it by supporting the constitutional amendment," he declares. "If they won't, I have to conclude that their peripheral-canal plan is really just another attack on all of the north coast's free-flowing rivers by thirsty Southern California interests."

All of those conflicting proposals are worthy elements of some coherent water plan for California, but none of them stands the slightest chance of ending up in such a plan in the near future. Each one invites a bitter fight—between Democrats and Republicans, between Northern California and Southern California, between urban California and rural California—and nobody is working to rebuild the fragile coalition that might accommodate the rivalries.

The price of the political stalemate is permanent drought—chronic water shortages, skyrocketing water rates, plummeting water quality—and a change in the very *idea* of California. The price of breaking the stalemate is high, too. "What is required is a personal kind of commitment on the part of the governor and the legislative leadership," says Leo McCarthy. "They've got to be prepared to put at risk some of their political chits. And if they don't commit to a sensible state water policy, then it's not going to happen, because it's a tough fight."

Of course, the deadlock over water development in California does not mean that the state is without a water policy. The failure to make a decision is a decision in itself. Today, because of the failure of leadership and the paralysis of the legislative process, it is the policy of California to allow the groundwater table to drop. It is the policy of California to allow the water quality and the wildlife of the Delta to decline. It is the policy of California to allow inflation to bloat the future cost of building a Delta facility, whether it is the peripheral canal or something else. Thanks to the politics of water, it is the policy of California to do nothing.