

## For Sale Cheap

Thanks to Rep. Robert L. Leggett (D., Calif.) we are able to pass on to our readers some glad news which the press has not seen fit to headline. The partly constructed Safeguard ABM base at Malmstrom, Mont. is up for grabs. When the site was acquired in 1969 it was deemed vital to national security, but under the changed conditions wrought by the U.S.-Soviet Union ABM treaty, the U.S. Army Air Defense Command is reluctantly turning it over to the General Services Administration for disposal. "Owner-Must Sell!" in the parlance of real estate advertising, and by all indications this one is going to be a real sacrifice.

The property consists of 641 acres owned in fee simple by the government, and 869 acres of easements so that the prospective buyer can get water from a distant res-

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ervoir. The original cost breaks down as follows:

Fee	\$ 198,369
Easements	115,548
Improvements	63,700,000

The improvements include 27 miles of water line with pumping stations, an uncompleted underground radar station and various other facilities, and—this is the big attraction—100,000 square feet of *underground* office space. The Army has not made any suggestions for use or conversion of the 2½ acres of office space, but obviously if any citizens are still interested in bomb-proof shelters, here is a real opportunity for a large family. Or, for clerical business purposes, it must be very quiet down there. The site would seem especially suitable for crypts or mausoleums. It has wonderful possibilities for both the dead and the living.

Mr. Leggett, unfortunately, takes a rather sour view of the ABM project as a whole and the Malmstrom installation in particular. He suggests that a bid of \$19.98 would probably take the property. We have spent \$8 billion on ABM systems which, Mr. Leggett asserts, are totally ineffective. It may be so; the fact that both the Soviet experts and our own have gone bearish on the ABM, after such high expectations, may account for the treaty on limitation of such systems. Originally there were to be twelve U.S. sites—Malmstrom, now defunct; another near Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota; a third to protect the nation's capital, and nine others now discarded. The \$8 billion is down the drain but, looking on the bright side, at least we shall not break ground on nine of the installations originally proposed.

Mr. Leggett argues that, since no Soviet ABM system could counter our nuclear deterrent, we have not improved our military position by the treaty, and, further, that the anti-ABM agreement removes the main rationale for our MIRV program. However, we are going ahead with the latter anyway, so our military leaders will not be entirely bereft of expensive playthings.

"So," Representative Leggett concludes gloomily, "we have spent \$8 billion to learn what we already knew and to help balance the Soviet budget"—that is, by saving them the cost of an ABM system. Granting that may be so, the fact should not be ignored that our country, in its present state of chronic anxiety, thrives on gaps—the Sputnik gap, the missiles gap, etc. Our economy would collapse without these lacunae. And finally, the real estate industry, already beset by high mortgage rates and prospective gasoline and fuel oil rationing, will get a much needed boost from the wild bargain being offered in Montana.