

COOS BAY TIMES CITY NEEDS NEW CHARTER

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LET US TALK IT OVER

IN ANOTHER column of this evening's paper, The Times prints a communication in reference to the recent action of the city council in granting the telephone franchise. The article was written by one of the most successful, prominent and practical business men of the city of Marshfield. While The Times cannot agree with him in all of his conclusions the subject is one of such grave public concern that it cannot receive too much publicity or discussion. The most important feature developed is the far reaching power invested in the city council in its authority to initiate a new ordinance and enact it into a fixed municipal law in one evening without prior notice, publicity or discussion. The only protection the people have from the abuse of this power is the initiative which is dilatory and difficult in affairs of this kind. If the council can do this, and The Times understands they were acting well within their rights and privileges, with a telephone franchise, there is nothing to prevent a similar action with a street railway franchise or any corporation request that may be presented for their consideration.

The Times must confess that it cannot see any reason for haste in granting the telephone franchise or for that matter in granting it at all at this time. The old company's franchise had several years to run and it should have been sufficient without the council rushing to the rescue with a franchise on a silver platter.

Every business man in Marshfield knows that Marshfield is entitled to an improved telephone service. It was the basis on which Messrs. Durrett and Douglas asked for a franchise for a new company. They apparently found it more convenient to make terms with the powers that be, purchase the old company and get their franchise. It would appeal to the average business man that the city council would conserve the city's rights by withholding this new franchise until the new company had shown by its work its earnest to improve the present service.

Another feature of the telephone franchise grant that is a trifle confusing is the action of the council in going into star chamber secret session to discuss and agree upon a question of important public concern. The Times believes that this, not only bad policy but inimical to the best interests of the city. The thought of the men chosen to guard the city's franchises and barring out tax-payers is not a pleasant one. The Times has confidence in the integrity of the individuals constituting the present council and it is for that reason it sees no necessity for star chamber sessions. It is simply establishing a bad precedent.

What is needed here, is more personal interest, individual concern, in public matters, especially with regard to franchises of all sorts and the council should encourage this interest. There is no use saying "it is none of our business"; it is altogether our business. It is public property that is being handled and public interest being served, and we are the public. There are excellent people in charge of these things, but the best of them grow careless, at times, high, and low; those who ordain things and those who do them as they are ordained, or as nearly as they can or will; and every time the private citizen butts in to have something amended he does a distinct favor and service to his fellow-taxpayer. It is not always pleasant, of course, but it is timely, essential, public-spirited, and it pays.

And this brings us to the consideration of the fact that the present method of transacting municipal affairs is anything but satisfactory. Marshfield is not alone in the realization of this truth. City, after city, all over the United States, is abandoning the old and cumbersome councilmanic system of government that for years has, in nearly every instance, demonstrated its aptitude for graft and inefficiency, and is taking on the newer, safer, more direct, and centralized, scheme of departmental commissions, whereby each element of municipal administration is given into the hands of a small group of men, especially equipped for the correct, adequate and economic handling of that separate interest, elected, paid, bonded, and held accountable, first and last, for the honest dispensing of the public trust confided to them.

The curse of the old vogue is the almost universal absence of all pay and emolument; the rule that thrusts honors upon a man without anything whatever to support them and make them something more than cheap and fictitious dignities. To this we owe the threadbare respect now attaching to the municipal official quality, at least so far as the councils are concerned. And, in many a case, their faces are saved by the courage, skill, and honesty of some well paid officer, who intervenes at the propitious moment of doubt, hazard or worse crisis.

Portland is looking to the change and studying it carefully with a view to putting it in practical use, and husbanding the wealth and attributes of the city, instead of frittering them away through reckless and shameful channels of divided authority, personal ineptitude, multiple functions, stupidity, inefficiency, indifference, and deliberate theft, the latter-day essentials of the municipal administrative code.

Of course, Marshfield has none of these disagreeable things to worry about, but, all the same, it will pay her (to save her acknowledged immunity), to take up the issue and never lay it down until she has put her civic responsibilities in hands, non-political hands, that will specialize, minimize, conserve, administer, and restore them to her, expanded, improved, with public costs invariably reduced. Look it up, Gentlemen of the Electorate!

Citizen Urges Change In Municipal Affairs — Criticises Granting of Franchise.

Marshfield, Or., Sept. 3, '08.
Editor Times,—

There comes a time in every boy's life as he steps from boyhood to manhood when the sense of his importance becomes so great that he is positively silly. Still, this has to be, and as he grows and finds out that there are others he settles down and soon becomes a necessary part in the community in which he lives. Just so with the present method of handling the city business of Marshfield. As we are stepping from a very small backwoods village to a city of some importance we find that we give our city officials authority to do things that when they act they appear just like the overgrown boy, only in place of being silly they appear absolutely senseless, and it is a wrong position to place six as bright men and a mayor as we have on our board of aldermen.

The Phone Franchise.
We saw it worked out in the telephone franchise just past. The report shows that these bright fellows had a secret session to talk telephone franchises with the promoter and at last consented to grant one in which the only positive condition was that the rates should be advanced; and also carrying a further advance that means when the cities of the Bay are united as they are bound to be before the improvements spoken of in the franchise are carried out, the telephone rentals will be doubled, when it is admitted that at the present rates there is money in it. We see the next night following this secret session this same Council take the matter up, put it on its final passage and all vote for it, thus binding this section to an increased expense to a corporation that has already had one good franchise that was fair to both sides and which was granted by this present council and of which they did not see fit to avail themselves. This new corporation has agreed to reconstruct the present system, putting in such a system as the council may ask for. Here is another chance for this bright body of men to show their superior knowledge of telephone systems and gives them an opportunity to take charge of the reconstruction. What a time they will have deciding on the plans. Personally, I think it will come down to a party line of no more than four phones and an increased rental. But it is too late to cry over spilled milk, unless the people of the town wish to take the matter up and stand on their rights given them by the Initiative and Referendum Act.

Need More Publicity.
I do not blame the council. They look just like a crowd of foolish boys with the powers that a silly town gives them, and it is time for this town to wake up and see that it cannot run its affairs along the lines mapped out by the early settler who never dreamed that Marshfield would ever want any plans carried out that did not have their conception in the heads of one or two people. Marshfield must get away from this charter. She must insist that no body of seven men can give away her rights over night. She must insist that all publicity be given all actions of the council before final action is taken by them. Be they ever so bright, no six or seven men would think of taking as important a step as this franchise without looking into it and getting all data if it was their own private business, and I very much doubt if any member of the board can tell what the usual charges for telephone rentals are on this coast. Still, they will vote for a franchise that advances the present rates that have been entirely satisfactory to both the company and to the town.

Need New Charter.
In writing this letter I regret very much that it may look as if I am criticizing the present members of the council. Far from it. They have my heartfelt sympathy. They are only carrying out a silly, boyish charter that we are expecting a manish city to be governed by. Wake up, Marshfield! Kick that charter so far that it will never come up even as a relic. Have a new charter drawn so that your business men will not be afraid to go on the board for fear of the false position they are to be placed in. Be men, not children.
A CITIZEN.

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