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THE RIGHT TO COMPETE

Commissioner George H. Flagg's decision allowing the Pacific Power & Light Co. to reduce rates to compete with the public utility district of northwestern Wasco county is heralded as unprecedented in Oregon. It is also utterly logical. The principles of competitive selling are well established in this country and, indeed, the PUD which invaded the territory built up and served by the company is making its bid for business on the strength of lower rates. To deny the company the right to meet competition would be equivalent to ordering it out of the field.

Price fixing for utilities has been for years a recognized and accepted function of the state but this price fixing, that is to say the setting of rates, is based on the theory of limitation of the profit to a just percentage computed on the cost of operation. In this there is involved the thought that users should be protected from unfair charges which could conceivably be made by a company holding the exclusive position which, up to the time of PUD legislation, the company was allowed to occupy. As an aspect of protection there has been the related power to require the lowering of rates, if warranted, and hence, odd as it may seem, the utility must request approval if it desires to put into effect a downward change in its schedule. There have been a number of such requests, voluntarily made. In our recollection, none has been denied.

These cases do provide a certain precedent, but with a noticeable difference. In them, the operator, through new efficiencies, volume increase, completion of the amortization of plant investment or other expense reductions, could make the permitted percentage under a lower rate structure. The reduction was authorized upon this showing. In the case on which the commissioner has just ruled, however, this factor is not at issue. The rate reduction is a means of survival in which the company is reducing also its permitted profit margin, perhaps even eliminating it.

Under the law the PUD could have replaced the company without the ruthlessness of cutthroat competition. The right is given it to condemn and purchase the facilities of the private operator but this opportunity it chose to ignore. Instead the idea was to put the company out of business (here the guiding hand of Bonneville, which has long busied itself in attempted eradication of private enterprise, may be seen) and then to pick up the pieces at a price which PUD, not a court of condemnation, would set.

The cold blooded brutality of this needless ruin-to-rule tactic seems strangely out of place in such a "do-good" organization as a public utility district is supposed to be. Yet there it is. But it was something that the commissioner could not countenance.

In his ruling, one paragraph especially worthy of quotation is emphatic on this point. It has been given in the news, but we present it again. Commissioner Flagg says:

Duplication of service and facilities by utilities has long been considered unsound and uneconomical and to result in disadvantage to the consumer. In The Dalles there are now two utilities where formerly but one existed. There is not enough business to support both. But is it within the province of a regulatory body to decide which will survive?

The conclusion, obviously, is that it is not. With this there can be no valid argument.

Development of a new strain of chickens is discussed editorially by the Oregon Journal, which observes that "inbreeding made it so that about 95 out of 100 are now born wingless". Regarding its own suggestion that the new fowls have somehow acquired one of the distinctive characteristics of the mammalia, the Journal, disappointingly makes no further disclosures.

Out on the Farm

By Ila S. Grant

July 13 — Last night we built a bonfire in the back yard, and before we knew it, a volunteer fire department was on hand to put out the conflagration.

A neighbor across the road from Upper Mosquito was the first to arrive on the scene. He lost no time, because over the holidays he had had a fire, himself. A real one. It was apparently started by someone who tossed firecrackers from the highway, he said, because he found portions of unexploded fireworks. The fire burned over an acre of ground and was dangerously near his lovely new home and his barley patch, before it was brought under control. He finally borrowed a pumper from Prineville and cooled things off, but one of his juniper trees was a casualty.

Well, our fire was a planned one, and it didn't get out of control. Leave it to a logger to have plenty of fire-fighting equipment on the scene. First the Chief strung out all the garden hose and hooked it up to the outdoor spigot, then rounded up a couple of axes, a hoe and a shovel, and set fire to the dry grass in a dozen or so places. The fire was spectacular for a few minutes, and the light seemed as bright as that of the mid-day sun.

The Head Fireman did a good job. He burned most of the trash, but spared a young fir tree that had been transplanted, and a day lily and a clump of Shasta clematis that are about ready to bloom. He burned off the golden glow, and it's no loss, I would say. It hadn't had enough water, and was withered and unimpressive looking anyway.

When the fire was out, the full moon rode high in the sky, orange-pink like a reflection from our own little fire. The moonlight was kind to the landscape, and the back yard looked park-like, with two kinds of poplars and a massive juniper standing out in bold relief.

When I led Gypsy from the front yard back to her corral for the night, she caught the smell of smoke and sniffed apprehensively, breathing hard and snorting nervously. Chessie and Fluff climbed up in a tree and howled like full grown Tom cats, and Jiggs whined plaintively.

We sprinkled the burned-over grass thoroughly before we went in the house, and the sprays of water were cool and refreshing in the warm night air.

WASHINGTON COLUMN

By Peter Edson

(NEA Washington Correspondent)

Washington (NEA)—As unemployment hangs around the 3,000,000 figure, doggedly refusing to drop, demands for an increase in government public works spending get louder and more insistent. Nobody in his right mind believes any more that leaf-raking or public works spending will cure a depression. The construction industry accounts for only about four per cent of present U.S. employment. But it is one of the least stable segments of the economy. When it starts slipping, other industries are apt to follow. It slipped badly in 1928, for instance. Look what happened in 1929.

From this has grown some belief that if the construction industry can be stabilized, it will help avert slumps in other lines.

Another lesson learned from the last depression is that it takes time to get a construction program going. Public works administration had \$3,000,000,000 to spend on useful projects in the 1930's. But it took PWA 18 months to plan and start men on the job.

Fearing that a serious depression might follow the last war, congress made \$65,000,000 available to the public works administration to aid state and local governments. Loans from this fund were made repayable when actual construction was started.

Authority to make these loans expired in July, 1947. Of the \$2,500,000,000 worth of projects planned, over \$1,500,000,000 worth have been built. The others are still on the shelf.

The theory that public construction should be curtailed in boom times and expanded in times of depression makes good economic sense. Doing it that way helps stabilize employment at high levels.

Several bills have been introduced in this session of congress to start planning again. Democratic senators Pepper of Florida and Green of Rhode Island have one to provide \$50,000,000 a year non-interest-bearing loans to state and local governments for planning.

Senator James E. Murray of Montana and six other democrats have in preparation a bill which would make \$7,000,000 a year available to federal works agency to finance planning of a 10-year, \$15,000,000,000 shelf of public works.

One bill which congress has passed and the president has signed provides for federal government planning and site acquisition. It was sponsored by Senator Dennis Chavez of New Mexico. It authorizes \$40,000,000 expenditures for planning new government buildings determined necessary by Postmaster Jesse M. Don-

aldson and the federal works administrator Jess Larson. In addition, \$30,000,000 would be made available to public buildings commissioner W. E. Reynolds for repair and modernization of existing federal buildings.

Other measures now before congress would of course increase federal construction funds if passed. The public housing and slum clearance bill, Columbia valley authority plan, a proposed \$600,000,000 military construction program, flood control, rivers and harbors, reclamation and public roads appropriations will step up expenditures materially. But it is doubtful if the efforts of any of this will be felt before 1950.

Estimates on construction activity for 1949 put the total volume at over \$18,000,000,000. Over \$5,000,000,000 of this is public construction—federal, state and local. It is divided roughly as follows: Highways, \$1,725,000,000; conservation, \$800,000,000; schools, \$800,000,000; sewers and waterworks, \$575,000,000; hospitals, \$425,000,000; military, \$100,000,000; miscellaneous, \$825,000,000.

Private construction is divided roughly \$6,000,000,000 residential, \$2,000,000,000 for utilities, \$1,000,000,000 industrial, \$1,000,000,000 commercial, \$2,000,000,000 miscellaneous.

At present labor rates and materials prices, with about 2,000,000 workers employed in the \$18,000,000,000-a-year construction industry, it takes about \$9000 expenditures to provide one man-year of work.

Others Say

WHERE LIBERALISM STOPS

(Astorian-Budget)

Oregon's "liberal" element will be startled by the news that the Oregon state grange convention has called for limitation of the franchise on tax matters to taxpayers. This would repeal the new state law extending the franchise in school financial elections to all registered voters.

The state grange has lately been in the forefront of all the reforms and changes advocated by the liberal wing of the Democratic party. It has claimed brotherhood with organized labor, has urged public power, the CVA and things of that nature.

The grange's liberalism evidently stops short of letting the much-loved common man vote on tax matters if the guy doesn't pay taxes himself.

When self-interest clashes with liberal idealism, the idealism too often suffers.

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Behind the Scenery

By Phil F. Brogan

BREATHING CAVERNS

Central Oregon's lava tunnels are exhaling again. These caverns, earth-scientists have discovered, inhale in frosty weather—and last winter they took a deep breath. In the early spring, when earth and air temperatures were about the same, the caves "held their breath."

The "breathing caverns" of the Deschutes country have long been of interest, and the changing circulation of air in the rock tunnels was noticed by pioneer stockmen. In the Bend area, tests were made this past year which bear out theories of geologists who have studied similar caves in New Mexico.

When the temperature this past winter dropped to the lowest mark in years, the Deschutes caves inhaled deeply. Smoke from test fires, started at cavern mouths in the cold weather, filtered into the cold chambers. Far back in one of the caves, flames of candles were sucked into lava cracks. Smoke that found its way into caves more than 1,000 yards quickly dissipated, apparently drawn into cracks in the lava walls.

Now, as summer sends the temperature up around the 90 degree mark, these same caves are exhaling. Wind came, a rugged cavern some 12 miles south of Bend, is one of the breathing caverns. So strong does wind from this cave blow on warm days that light objects tossed into the opening are carried aloft. The roar of the wind from this cave on a hot day, when the temperature is around 100 degrees, can be heard a considerable distance.

Why do these caverns breathe? On warm days, the cold air near the mouth of the cave expands, rushes out and is replaced by a continuous flow of cold air from the chilled inner chambers. In the winter, the cold outer air settles into the caverns, flows into side tunnels and seeps into fissures and cracks.

Cave students say that this seasonal change in circulation is a factor in the building up of deposits of ice in certain caves. Other factors are the presence of seepage and the direction in which the caves open.

Ora Allen Dies At Prineville

Ora Allen, a former resident of Redmond, died yesterday in Prineville following a long illness. He was 67 years of age.

Funeral services will be held at 2 p.m. tomorrow at the Redmond Christian church with Rev. D. L. Penhollow officiating. Burial will be Friday at 2 p.m. in the Lincoln Memorial park in Portland. Zachary mortuary is in charge of the arrangements.

Mr. Allen had been a resident of Oregon for the past 49 years. He lived in Redmond for two years. He was born June 24, 1882, in Chillicothe, Mo.

Mr. Allen is survived by his wife, Bertha, of Redmond; a son, Lloyd, of Portland; three sisters, Mrs. Lillith Hill, Twin Falls, Ida, Mrs. Grace Cobb, Salinas, Calif., and Mrs. Aloha Carver, Coquille.

Also surviving Mr. Allen are two brothers, three sisters, and five grandchildren.

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