

Public Utilities Commissioner Thinks He Has too Much Power

By PAUL W. HARVEY, JR.

Charles H. Heltzel, Oregon's tall, affable 39-year-old public utilities commissioner, probably has more power than any other state official.

And he doesn't think too much of the idea, either.

He decides how much 180 private utilities can charge for their telephone, electric, gas and water service. He fixes freight rates within the state for 17,000 truckers and the railroads.

Oregon is the only state which has a single official regulating these utilities and freight haulers. California, for instance, has a five-man board, and Washington state has three men.

Heltzel, who bosses more than 200 employees and who has been on the job almost two years, makes his own laws, in some cases. As an example, he can say what safety equipment must be carried by trucks.

In conducting hearings on rates or other matters, he presides as judge, prosecutor and jury.

That's a lot of responsibility for one man, and Heltzel doubts if it's democratic. He's one public official, a rare type, who thinks he's too powerful.

He doesn't like the responsibility of making regulations governing the operation and safety of trucks. He says it's hard to get district attorneys and justices of the peace to prosecute and convict violators of his regulations.

"Then why don't you ask the legislature to put the regulations into law," we asked. "I tried that," Heltzel replied, "but the legislature would rather not have to tackle that job."

However, the 1955 legislature might put the regulations into law. The supreme court, bawling out the legislature for letting the department of agriculture make laws on aerial spraying of farm crops, recently served notice that the legislature must make all the laws. Heltzel, a lawyer and former attorney for the corporation department, has the reputation of conducting his hearings fairly. Lawyers on all sides have told us that conducting those hearings is a hard job, especially when they come one after the other, like they are now.

He sits on the bench with David Don, his chief engineer, at his side. Don says, jokingly, that Don runs the works, and Heltzel is the captain who pulls the whistle.

Heltzel had to preside over the hearing on the 20 per cent electric surcharge. Now he's in the midst of the telephone rate hearing. Next will come more surcharge hearing, and then the hearing on the California-Oregon Power company's request for a rate increase.

When the hearings shut down for the day, Heltzel often works far into the night to do his other work. Sitting at a hearing is hard work. The testimony is dry, so there's a compelling desire to go to sleep. There usually are smart lawyers on both sides, so Heltzel has to stay alert to keep them in bounds.

He has to decide what rates are needed to assure a utility or freight carrier a fair profit, generally around 6 per cent.

Delving into a utility company's financial affairs is a man-sized job. It's especially complicated when you have a company like the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Co., of which more than 90 per cent is owned by the American Telephone and Telegraph Co.

In a hearing, the company which wants higher rates presents its own witnesses, who say the company has to have higher rates because its profits are too low.

Then Heltzel's lawyer, John R. McCullough, takes over, cross-examining each of the witnesses. The opponents of the

increase also quiz the company's officials.

After Heltzel rules, either party to a case can appeal to the courts. This seldom happens.

A company which doesn't think it gets a big enough increase soon files a request for another increase.

His motor transportation division, which collects eight million dollars a year in truck taxes, is a heavy responsibility, too. The legislature is thinking of taking it away from him, and putting it into a new department of motor vehicles.

At the last legislature, Heltzel was asked what he thought of losing this half of his department. He amazed the legislators by saying he doesn't care.

In any government, an official who doesn't mind losing some of his powers is a rare bird.

The Spanish word *armadillo* means "little armed one."

Coca-Cola Prices Upped

And now it's Coca-Cola.

The last of the old reliable 5-cent articles, and one that for generations has been selling for a nickel a bottle, has gone up in price. It will be eight cents now in grocery stores and 10 in dispensing machines.

St. Elmo Masengale, who runs the Coca-Cola bottling works in Salem, says his plant is the last of 20 independent

plants in Oregon to up the price, and maybe on the whole Pacific Coast.

"It was just necessary," he said, "to keep up the quality." Masengale said that in grocery stores there would be special package prices—six bottles for 42 cents and 12 for 85.

Some of the dispensing machines have already been changed to the new price, and others will be in the next few days.

Septic sore throat in man often is caused from germs in infected milk.

Hay Talks on City Courts

"It's safer to commit murder than to stand trial in an inferior court" is often the conviction of many people," declared Judge Douglas Hay, magistrate of the Salem municipal court as he addressed the noon meeting of the Exchange club at the Senator hotel Wednesday.

"The inferior courts have often been called 'kangaroo courts' because people think

the cards are stacked against them' before they start. This view was especially prevalent in the days of the 'fee system' in which the judge received as his wages a percentage of the fines he assessed," Judge Hay stated. "In these cases it was often a temptation for some judges to convict almost everyone. About eight-tenths of one per cent of those who pleaded 'not guilty' were so found."

"Most magistrates, including the Salem municipal judge, are now on a salary basis, and now about 35 per cent of those pleading 'not guilty' prevail," Judge Hay said.

"About 8 per cent of Salem's

population faces trial in the courts each year, of which 97 per cent are tried by an inferior court. A total of about \$115,000 in fines was assessed last year in Salem," the judge continued.

"In Salem the municipal court is an independent branch of the government and as such is not subject to influence from the police department or any other source. There's nothing about a policeman's uniform which lends credibility to a story, so therefore the common citizen's views are considered with equal weight to that of a police officer's."

TOUGH FOR GEORGE
Devizes, England (AP)—George Dobson has been barred from riding his motorcycle until he is 98 years old. George is 98. He was convicted Wednesday of riding "without due care and attention" for cutting across a road in front of a car. The arresting officer said a bottle of whisky fell out of the nonagenarian's pocket en route to the police station.

For Hot Grocery Prices See Saving Center Ad On Page 8, Food Section

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7⁹⁸

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Sally's

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