

Polk County Observer

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Office.....517-519 Court Street
Telephone.....Main 19

BY H. W. BRUNE

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A COMMENDABLE ACT.

The action of the county courts of Marion and Polk counties in closing the rickety, shaky bridge over the river at Salem this week is a commendable one. For more than four years the structure has been declared unsafe, in fact it was first condemned in 1912, and that no accident has happened since that time, and that the bridge was able to withstand the burden of heavily increased travel since the auto has come into general use, is almost a miracle. In its present stage engineers pronounce it absolutely unsafe; it is as liable to fall of its own accord as with a load upon it they say.

For some time there had been an insistent demand made for its closing, but the two courts had been prevailed upon to let it remain open for use under certain traffic restrictions. The inconvenience of a number of people seemed to be paramount, in the minds of some, to safety. Its closing, however, has now removed the possibility of loss of life through its failure and has taken away the responsibility of the counties for accident. Polk county people very generally approve of the prompt action of Judge Kirkpatrick and Commissioners Manston and Beckett in demanding the close of the structure at this time.

Now that the old bridge has gone into disuse, and funds have been appropriated for the erection of a new one, the two county courts state they will use all possible haste in building the new bridge. Though the question of what type to build still remains to be threshed out, it seems that the general sentiment of people, in Polk county at least, is for the high level concrete bridge and the courts in making the selection will, no doubt, take this sentiment into consideration.

MUCH WORK FOR CONGRESS

The prospect that congress will finish its legislative program before it is time to adjourn is rather dubious, to say the least. With less than sixty working days left before the session must end, it will require some tall hustling to dispose of even half of the important bills and measures still remaining to be acted upon, and this probably is about as far as congress will get before the arrival of March 4.

Among the more important measures now pending are the following: Fifteen appropriation bills, five of which have passed the house and are now in senate committees; the proposed railroad legislation, revenue measure, a water power bill, mineral lands and oil leasing bill, the "dry" bill for the District of Columbia, the flood control bill, the public buildings bill, the Porto Rico bill, the Smith vocational educational bill, the corrupt practices bill, the national prohibition constitutional amendment resolution and the woman suffrage amendment.

This is a rather formidable list one that cannot be disposed of quickly, no matter how attentive to business the members may be from now on. Some of the measures will of course be whipped into shape in committee, but others are sure to cause considerable debate and argument, which will take time and delay the program of actual enactment. The most puzzling problem of all is probably to be found in the proposed railroad legislation, which looks to the enlargement of the interstate commerce commission, for the adoption of a system of arbitration to prevent strikes and lockouts and giving the president power to take over the railroads in case of military necessity. That congress will require some time to dispose of this measure goes without saying, and there are several other questions almost as difficult of solution.

At the commencement of the session there was much talk of "speeding up" the work and trying to get through before time for adjournment. Instead of following this plan the same old tactics of delay and procrastination were followed, and now it is conceded there is little chance for clearing the calendar before the session comes to an end. Of course there will be the usual grand rush near the close of the session, but the present prospect is that only the absolutely necessary measures will be acted upon, while the others will have to go over until congress again meets. Whether it will be necessary to call

congress in special session to finish its work cannot be foretold, but there seems to be a fair chance this may be the outcome.

BARELY HOLDING THEIR OWN.

An interesting fact brought out by the completed statistics of the recent national election is the poor showing made by the so-called minor parties. The total Prohibition vote, for instance, was only 225,000, in round numbers, a trifle over one per cent of the total vote cast. The Socialists did somewhat better, with 750,000 votes, but this, the same as with the Prohibitionists, was a falling off from the high record of the party in the past. In 1912 the Socialists polled 901,000 votes for Mr. Debs, while the Prohibitionists reached their high-water mark in 1892, with a registry of 264,000.

Neither of these parties, in other words, seems to be making appreciable gains in the matter of vote getting, regardless of how they are succeeding in disseminating the principles on which their organizations are based. And last year they had every opportunity to show their full strength, for there was a smaller number of tickets in the field, as compared with several preceding elections.

As a matter of fact, it would appear that the American people have little inclination to encourage or join the so-called minor parties. An independent political movement occasionally acquires a considerable following, as occurred in the 1912 election when the Progressives fairly split the Republican vote in two, and also in a preceding election when the gold Democrats did the same thing to the regular Democrats. Such incidents, however, have been based on extraordinary conditions, and when the special questions involved have been settled the party "splits" have been healed and the opposing factions reunited. But the small independent parties have made slow headway and can find little encouragement in the showing which they made in the last general election.

WHEN SOCIALISM CROPS OUT.

Socialism always crops out and socialistic agitation invariably takes a fresh start whenever there is a hitch in the orderly processes of life, giving the appearance that a portion of the general public is getting the worst of it, or is likely to get the worst of it. Such a chance came to the socialists last fall, at the time of the dispute between the railroads and their employees, and the socialists quickly seized this opportunity to advocate their pet theory of government ownership. Similarly the socialists are finding another golden opportunity to push and expound their principles, in the present high cost of living, a thing that really is worrying a great many people and causing all kinds of suggested remedies.

As usual, the socialists have—or think they have—an easy and sure cure for inflated prices, and their plan has been embodied in a bill presented to congress by Representative Meyer London, a socialist member from the state of New York. This measure provides for the creation of a federal food commission to consist of the secretary of agriculture and the secretary of commerce and labor and their assistants, which shall immediately investigate the supplies of food and food products. In case the supplies shall be found insufficient this fact shall be certified to the president who shall then prohibit the exportation from the United States of any farm products and of any article of food. Thus far the bill is merely one to provide for an embargo and is probably designed to attract those votes which are known to favor an embargo. The "punch" of the bill comes in the next section which provides:

"The commission shall prepare and recommend legislation to enable the government of the United States, or some governmental agency to be created by law, to regulate the transportation, marketing, preservation and distribution of food and to acquire and maintain, build and construct, equip, manage, own and control all such buildings, plants, structures, warehouses, granaries, abattoirs and each and every thing or things incidental to, connected with or necessary to the exercise by the government of complete control over the supply and distribution of food."

Of course this bill will not be passed. The country is not ready for as radical a step as either an embargo on food exports or government control of food supplies would be. In case no revelation of criminal activities follows the investigation made by the department of justice, the net result of all the present agitation will be nothing. The public, realizing that the whole world is having to pay enormously for what it eats and wears, will decide to await the end of the war and the harvesting of better crops. But every situation like this gives the socialists a chance to further their propaganda.

MEASURE CALLS FOR DEFEAT.

There is little to commend in the bill now before congress which pro-

vides for reducing the postage on so-called drop letters to one cent and for increasing the rates on second-class mail matter. Drop letters are those which are to be delivered in the same town where they are mailed, and at present they take the same rate as letters destined for distant delivery. This of course means that the government is not put to the expense of transporting such mail for any considerable distance, but even so there is no good reason why a drop letter should take the same rate as a postal card. The latter serves for an informal message, and when a letter is enclosed and sealed a two cent charge is not unreasonable, considering the service given.

As a matter of fact, moreover, drop letters are used but little as a means of communication between persons residing in the same city. When a personal visit is not advisable the telephone, which is quick, convenient and accurate, is the substitute most frequently resorted to. The mails are too slow and too formal, and post-office records show that ordinary drop letters constitute but a very small portion of the mail matter handled. It is true they are used to a considerable extent for sending out bills, statements and advertising, but here again the merchants and others get full value for the charge that is made. The proof of this is to be found in the very fact that businessmen use the mails for such purposes, which argues there is neither call or occasion for reducing the rate on such mail, as it would benefit but a comparatively few and scarcely would call forth an expression of thanks.

To increase the rates on second-class mail matter, on the other hand, would be a blow to nearly everybody. It would mean that every subscriber receiving a paper or periodical through the mails would be compelled to pay increased subscription rates, based on the additional postage charge, for of course publishers could not be expected to stand this increased cost, burdened as they already are with high costs for paper and about everything else they use in preparing their publications. Naturally, therefore, they would pass along this additional postage expense to subscribers, and the latter would have to stand it, or cancel their subscriptions and go without their customary reading, an alternative that would be far from pleasing to most people.

While it undoubtedly is true that the second-class mail rate is low, it is the public and not the publishers who get the real benefit of this condition. Occasionally some official figures out that the government "loses money" on account of the low second-class mail rate, but even if this is true it is an expense that brings benefits far greater in value than the cost to the government. Through papers and periodicals the people are kept informed and abreast of the times, making them better prepared to shape their own lives and activities, and better qualified to guide and support the government in its conduct of public affairs and business. It would be a blow to democracy, in fact, to hamper the people in securing cheap reading, and this would be the inevitable result of increasing the postage rate on second-class mail. And this alone should be sufficient to defeat the measure referred to, proposing a revision of postage rates along the lines suggested.

PANAMA CANAL AGAIN READY.

Official announcement is made that the Panama canal has been freed of obstructions caused by the land slides at Culebra and Cueraeha, and that regular traffic through this short-cut waterway soon will be resumed. The belief also is expressed by officials that no further trouble of this character will be experienced, which is encouraging, to say the least. There has been some alteration of the original plans, it would seem, for it is explained that in repairing the damage caused by the slides the channel has been cleared to a depth of thirty-five feet for about half of its width, and to thirty feet for the remainder. This makes the big ditch somewhat shallower than originally was contemplated, but doubtless capable of handling all traffic, else the engineers would not have adopted this plan.

The point of interest is that the canal is again ready for business, with good prospect that no further interruptions of traffic will occur. And as the American people have invested about \$400,000,000 in this improvement they will be very glad to know the work is regarded as finally completed and that the investment will now commence to bring in tangible returns. During the brief time the canal was in operation, before the slides caused trouble, a very satisfactory revenue resulted, with prospect of a steady increase. And as soon as the great war ends and commerce returns to normal conditions, it is believed that traffic through the canal will rapidly grow, with a corresponding increase in tolls.

In this connection, however, it is pointed out that in order to get the full benefits and advantage of the canal, this country must do something to relieve itself of its present de-

pendence on foreign shipping. The foreign commerce of the United States has increased wonderfully since the commencement of the war, but it will be hampered and handicapped unless an American merchant marine is developed to take care of it. This is a problem that cannot be ignored, and the sooner that congress addresses itself to a solution of this question the better it will be for this nation and its business interests.

Talk about your mean men—here is a story about a man in Colorado who is forced to pay \$45 a month alimony to his divorced wife and who makes the payments regularly in copper pennies. And to still further show his disrespect he recently gummed up the coins with glue and molasses, thereby causing additional annoyance and vexation.

The new year has started out splendidly, so far as the weather is concerned. And here is hoping the year will keep up this record of consistency, giving us an early spring and a good old-fashioned summer.

From the talk of Tom W. Lawson one gathers that he is more interested in doing something to better the Wall street "bunch," than in proving that diplomatic secrets have leaked from Washington.

The Washington administration appears ready to abandon its plan to "get Villa." It is not impossible, however, that the time will come when Carranza will ask Uncle Sam to help carry out the old program.

About eight billion dollars was the value of Uncle Sam's foreign trade last year. No wonder that uncle is commencing to wonder how he best can spend all the surplus profits.

Washington officials still are hoping the Mexican situation will solve itself. And perhaps it will—Villa cannot live forever.

Some people, however, will not be able to appreciate the beauties of the new year until after their taxes are paid up.

SOME THINGS

Prunes Are Golden Eagles.

A record of \$66,000 profit from 37 acres of prunes in the last six years was the foundation of the address of L. F. Russell, the Washouga, Washington, prune king, before the prune convention at O. A. C. last week. Fertilizers, tillage, pruning, and spraying, are the means by which he works this magic of the soil and grows a big crop of high class prunes every year.

When Mr. Russell came into possession of his prune orchard it was in a badly run down condition. He cut out the old and undesirable wood, 17 cords of limbs and 100 loads of brush. The young trees he headed the first year but only thinned thereafter, and they came into bearing at four years old. Old wood is cut out or when dead broken with gloved hands.

The real magic of the wonderful yield is the fertilizer—ten tons of cheap manure per acre every year. He used to buy this but now produces it on the farm. Every fall he buys up a big lot of feeders, which he confines in sheds for the entire fattening period. He buys every ounce of feed, in ear lots, which the sheep convert into manure while putting on flesh. The value of this manure with the straw litter just about equals the price of feed, leaving the grain in the carcass to labor and profit. This year he markets 4000 head of fat sheep and lambs, receiving the equivalent of 25 cents per pound for the latter in the Seattle market.

Early and thorough plowing is another item. This must be done not later than March 20.

Tillage is frequent and thorough up to mid-August, averaging more than a score of workings.

Spraying systematically for brown rot is said to be so essential that there is no success without it. Bordeaux is used.

In general pruning, heavy thinning is performed.

Tools are simply an Oliver Chilled plow, spike harrow, and clod masher. Two men and one team are required the year round.

That the system will work for other people Mr. Russell has proved. On near-by prune farms he has directed operations yielding about the same profit per investment.

"Many prune men said that the talk was worth more than the cost of the trip to Farmers' week," said Professor Lewis in discussing the subject. —Farmers' Week News.

Several Would Operate Ferry.

Three Independence people have applied to the county court for the contract to run the ferry, there. The court will let the contract March 1. More applicants are expected.

NORMAL NOTES

Sunday afternoon and evening the trains running into Monmouth were filled with a jolly crowd of students happy in their return to the old college town. The baggage rooms, too, were crammed with suitcases and mysterious parcels which later yielded up treasures that proved to be Christmas gifts from admiring relatives and friends. After the usual excitement subsequent to the arrival of each new train load had somewhat subsided, following the arrival of the evening special, the students began to turn their thoughts to the more serious problem of settlement for a long period of work at school.

During the chapel hour Monday morning President Ackerman gave an inspiring talk suitable to the first meeting of the student body in the new year of nineteen seventeen. After listening to one of these addresses one cannot help but feel a more earnest desire to excel in all the school activities and in the world as well.

The faculty staff is still somewhat crippled since Professor Gentle is not yet able to return to his school duties. All the good wishes and sympathy of the student body are with him in his illness and all are looking forward to his return in a few weeks.

Miss Myra Butler, the domestic science and art instructress, spent part of her vacation in a Salem hospital from which she returns looking well, but unable to get around without the use of her wheelchair. She is keeping up her classwork as usual, however.

Mr. Butler has been on the sick list, but is now much improved and is teaching his normal classes in history and civics as usual.

The children in the training department are back in their places at school and the measles epidemic seems over.

Since there are but three weeks until the close of the first semester, the student teachers are putting in some good work now. The students are looking over their text books preparatory to the final examinations which will soon take place.

Practice for literary society began today. Friday night the usual meeting will be held.

Seniors are proudly displaying their Normal class pins which have just arrived. Normal rings are now quite the vogue, also, since Santa Claus seems to have packed some in his bag.

Many Normal students and all the faculty who were at home attended the Normal banquet held at the Portland hotel during the Christmas vacation. The strong bond that unites these people, working for a common cause, was plainly shown here. Those who were present, besides having a good time, went away with a strong feeling for the old Normal and its faculty, students and friends.

Card of Thanks.

I wish to thank the people of road district No. 20 for the interest they took in having the county court appoint me as road supervisor. For this favor I will give the best service that is in me and will endeavor to get full value for every dollar entrusted to me. I shall expect just as good day's work from men employed on the road as would be given any private employer. Evan Evans.

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