

Harney Valley Items.

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HOUSE BILL IS BAD

Weak Points in Irrigation Measure Pointed Out.

Washington, March 19.—George H. Maxwell, executive chairman of the National Irrigation Association, has returned to Washington, after an absence of several weeks in the West. The remarkable change in public sentiment throughout the Eastern States during the past two years in favor of National Irrigation, which has found such marked expression in the present session of Congress, is generally conceded to be due largely to the work of this National association, a majority of the members of which represent the largest commercial and manufacturing concerns in the country. It is believed by many members of Congress that if the irrigation bill now pending before the House was to receive the support of the National Irrigation Association it would pass; and, on the other hand, that if the association should strongly oppose the measure it would be defeated. On being asked if the association would favor the bill Mr Maxwell said:

"That depends on what bill you mean. There are two bills and you must not confuse them. If you refer to the compromise committee bill, as now pending in the House of Representatives I would say no, most emphatically no. If you refer to the Senate bill, as it was amended in the Senate and passed that body, it was a great improvement and with some further amendment could be made as good a bill as was the original Hansboro-Newlands bill in the last session."

"What is the objection to the House bill?"

"Well, I will show you. Did you ever see a flock of blackbirds following a plow? Well, that is just the way the scammers and speculators and land grabbers would follow in a flock after the Government surveyors, from the moment they went into the field to begin the survey of any Government system under a law such as has been reported from the irrigation committee to the House. Every bit of land irrigable from irrigation works when built would be filed on by speculators before the Government workmen stuck a pick into the ground. Not an acre would be left for actual settlers. Then the government would have to either abandon the enterprise or build it for the benefit of a lot of speculators and rely on getting its money back from the sale of water rights to lands in private ownership, and under the state control clause, in section 3 of the bill, the Government would not have the slightest power in any way to enforce payment for these rights. The home maker and the Government would both be left out in the cold under that bill, but the speculators would feather their nests well."

"The National Irrigation Association stands for a principle. It demands that what is left of the public domain shall be reserved for actual settlers, and that the further spoliation of the public lands by speculators and its absorption into great ranches to the exclusion of home builders must and shall be stopped. It will never surrender or compromise that principle for mere expediency or to gain a temporary advantage."

Does not the House bill as reported reserve the land for homestead settlers?" Mr Maxwell was asked.

"No," he replied, "it does not,

although it is so drawn that it would deceive many people into thinking it did. It says in section 3 that the lands proposed to be irrigated shall be subject to entry only under the homestead law, but this clause is a delusion and a snare, because it is inoperative until the Secretary of the Interior gives public notice designating the land irrigable under the system, which he is not to do until the contract for construction has been actually let. Before then all the land would be filed on by speculators. The Senate amended this and provided that this notice should be given as soon as the Secretary of the Interior determines the project to be practicable. This is an improvement, but still is not enough. The land should at all times be open to homestead entry, subject to the charges and conditions of this act, but when ever the Secretary decides to survey any proposed project, he should, before the surveyors go in the field, temporarily withdraw the land from scrip and desert land entry and as soon as the surveys are completed he should determine whether the project is practicable and if it is give the notice, and if not reopen the land to general entry."

"If the bill could be passed would it not be better to have it go through in any shape even if it could not be amended?"

"To have a bill pass which would destroy itself in its practical operations, and provide nothing but a graft for speculators, would be a fatal mistake from the standpoint of the West. The whole strength of the irrigation movement in the East, and the reason for its remarkable growth, has been the confidence of the business interests of the East that it was a movement which was really and genuinely proposing to make opportunities for settlers and create dense populations and make new markets, and that men who wanted to build homes would have the benefit of the opportunities created by the Government appropriations. If you destroy this confidence you destroy the movement and the West cannot afford to do it for any temporary advantage. The fight between those who want homemaking and population and those who want speculation and land grabbing had far better be fought out first, than to surrender to the speculators and lose the confidence of the East."

"How do other organizations stand on this point?"

"Every organization, whether it be commercial, labor or manufacturing, which has indorsed the National irrigation movement, and there are a multitude of them, has demanded that the lands to be reclaimed shall be reserved for actual settlers only. Every one of them is arrayed against what would hap-

pen under this bill as Mr. Mondell has reported it from the committee. That bill is contrary to the President's message. He said that the lands should be reserved for the settlers. It is contrary to the constitution of the National Irrigation Association, which demands the same thing."

"Could the bill be so amended as to remove the objections you have suggested?"

"Of course it could. The original Hansbrough-Newlands bill was in its general features a sound measure and had the support of the National Irrigation Association."

"What amendments ought to be made to the bill?"

"The lands should be reserved for actual settlers as I have already explained. The right to get a water right from a Government system for private lands should not only be limited to 160 acres to any one landowner, as the bill provides, but should be further limited to actual bona fide permanent residents on the lands. If the nonresidents are allowed the right, the 160-acre limitation will be evaded by wholesale."

"The clause giving each state exclusive control should be stricken out. It is unnecessary. The preceding clause of section 8, which provides that there shall be no interference with the laws of any state, is all that is needed to protect the states."

"It is the law of the arid region today that priority of right arising from actual beneficial use of the water applies to the whole stream, regardless of the state lines. There is absolutely no doubt about it that this is the law. No change should be made in it by Congress."

"The association will favor the appropriation for the reclamation of arid lands that will open up opportunities for actual settlers to build homes and reserve the land for them, and it will oppose any plan that does not do that. We have enough big ranches in the West already."

BIG LOSS IN WHEAT

Half Million Acres Wiped Out By Frosts.

Half a million acres of Winter wheat have been reown in Oregon, Washington and Idaho, the result of the February frosts which came down with killing effect on a number of unprotected localities in the three states says the Oregonian. Umatilla County alone was damaged to the extent of 100,000 acres. Walla Walla County was still harder hit. Eureka Flat, which produces more big crops than any other section in Washington, was practically all reseeded, and there is a big Winter wheat district in the Palouse that will this year be planted in Spring grain after the Fall wheat was wiped out entirely or left in such straggling patches that it was drilled over and reown. Conflicting reports have been coming in from the wheat districts since the cold weather nearly two months ago, but it was not until the past few days of warmer weather that the full extent of the damage was learned, and some fields which had apparently come through the Winter all right are now being reseeded.

In Oregon the greater part of the damage is confined to Umatilla County, but some of the exposed patches in Morrow County were also touched sufficiently to demand reseeded of the whole or a part of the affected farms. Between County and Eureka Flat the damage runs in places as high as 75 per cent.

Over toward Dayton the damage is lighter, and as there is very little Winter wheat in that vicinity, the effect will not be felt. The cold wave swept across Snake River and killed a lot of wheat on the new acreage around Washburn, then hit the high spots again in the vicinity of Ritzville. In the heart of the Palouse around Colfax, Garfield and St. John entire fields were wiped out, and the per cent of damage throughout that section was very high. It struck the Idaho line south of Moscow, but the effect was milder, the damage around Genesee being only about 30 per cent. The Big Bend escaped the frost, except in that territory from this cause is inconsequential.

The exact effect of this extensive damage cannot be determined until harvest. With a favorable Spring wheat season the yield on the reseeded ground may be pulled up to nearly the same figures as would have been returned from the Winter crop. Conservative men, however, estimates that under the best circumstances it would not be safe to figure on within five bushels per acre of the yield that would have been secured from Winter wheat. If this ratio of loss should hold for the entire tract damaged, there will be a theoretical shortage of 2,500,000 bushels of wheat. To this must be added 500,000 bushels of actual wheat used for reseeded, making a total of 3,000,000 bushels of wheat lost by the severity of the weather in February. At present prices this would represent a loss of approximately \$2,000,000. With conditions similar to those of last season from now on, there will still be as much wheat in the Pacific Northwest as there was last year. This is due to the fact that there quite a material increase in the acreage, there being more new land under cultivation for both Winter and Spring wheat than ever before.

From the big bend, which turned off a wonderful crop last year, comes reports that there is a decided lack of moisture, and that the condition of the crop is by no means as good as it was a year ago, and it is feared that the lack of moisture can not be made up in time to do much good in pulling the crop up to the proportions of a year ago. In the Big Bend country there is more new acreage than in any other section, and it is on this new acreage that the railroads are depending for a standoff for the the poor yield which now seems inevitable. The reseeded in Umatilla and Walla Walla Counties has not been done under very favorable circumstances, for immediately after the drills stirred up the ground a dry wind swept over the country and absorbed considerable moisture, leaving the ground so dry that the wheat was very slow in germinating, and will not have a very good start. The situation as compared with the past few years might be summarized as follows:

A larger acreage of Spring and Winter wheat combined than ever before. A very small acreage of Winter wheat in first-class condition, and a very large acreage of Spring wheat in hardy as good condition as that of a year ago.

Union County, which lost more heavily than any other section last season, is now in fine condition, the crop never looking better, and similar reports are received from Sherman and Wasco Counties. Fortunately for Portland, there is more of the damaged territory tributary to Puget sound than to Portland, but even the Puget Sound cities will not suffer much if say loss of business if there is favorable Spring wheat weather, for they have a very large area of new wheat land in their territory.

Oregon Historical Society