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Ladies' Day

Second of a Series on Backgrounds of the Pacific War

As The PHILIPPINES Faced the Advancing Jap

By C. D. MENSALVAS, Executive Secretary
Philippine Commonwealth Defense Council

Last Friday Dr. Lester Proebstel gave City Club members a new slant on Malaya. This week our spotlight is turned on The Philippines, where General MacArthur's tough little army of Yanks and Filipinos is still holding out against the invading Japs.

The part of Philippine guerillas in making their islands hot for the Jap was emphasized last week, when a few of them swooped down on a Jap-held airport and destroyed the garrison there. While these irregulars are harrying the enemy from behind, their brothers in the U. S. Army on Bataan peninsula are frustrating every attempted Jap advance with a courage that has several times called forth the praise of their commander-in-chief.

As a representative of his people, Chris Mensalvas is excellently qualified to speak of their history, their culture, their aspirations, and their part in the war. He was born on the big island, Luzon, and since coming to the Pacific coast has maintained steady correspondence with friends in The Philippines. He has attended U. C. L. A., received his B.A. from U. S. C., '33, and is now editor of the Cannery Field Workers News.

ALSO

WALTER A. DURHAM, Chairman
"Sewer Users Charge Committee"

A report by the section on Planning and Public Works published on page 100 of this issue.

Harmony in Diversity - - - Active Citizenship
SEWAGE DISPOSAL AND THE SEWER CHARGES
A Report by the Section on Planning and Public Works

To the Board of Governors of the City Club:

Your committee appointed to study the status of the sewer user service charges in Portland has held several meetings, during which officials of the City Department of Public Works and of the Sewer Charge Equalization Board were interviewed, in addition to several interested citizens and consulting chemists. The committee presents the following report:

Sewage Disposal in Other Cities

A growing number of American cities are operating municipal plants for the treatment of sewage. According to data compiled in 1941 by the International City Managers' Association, of the 14 cities with populations of more than 500,000, only 4 do not have sewage disposal plants. Of the 29 cities in the 200,000 to 500,000 population class, 20 operate sewage plants. Among the 9 which still discharge raw sewage are Jersey City, Birmingham, Louisville, San Diego, and Portland.

The type of plant and the degree of treatment accorded the sewage varies from city to city due to a multiplicity of factors which have to be weighed in designing the system. Among the more important considerations are the amount of sewage to be handled, whether or not storm and sanitary sewers are combined, topography of the land, area served, rainfall, and methods of disposing of the effluent and solid wastes.

Despite widespread publicity given to the possible disposal of processed sewage wastes as fertilizers, the financial benefits accruing from such sales have not been great in any instance and the present trend appears to be toward incineration of the sludge with or without utilization of the relatively high fuel value of the wastes to power the operation of the plant itself.

Stream Pollution

Since the formation in 1926 of the Anti-Pollution League of Oregon, consisting of representatives of several state and municipal agencies, attention has repeatedly been directed to the seriousness of pollution in the Willamette River and its tributaries. The problem is particularly acute in the lower Willamette during the dry summer months when there is very little stream flow and practically no rainfall to dilute the sewage before it enters the river, with the result that not only is any remaining oxygen in the river consumed, but offensive sludge beds create a public nuisance and sometimes interfere with navigation. The situation is even more acute in the case of the sewage discharged into the Columbia Slough, where almost no stream flow occurs in the summer months. Added to the normal sewage at this point are the wastes from meat-packing and wood products industries, creating an open cess-pool.

It is beyond the scope of this report to review in detail the aesthetic and public health aspects of stream pollution, subjects which have been covered at length elsewhere. No longer is the question of stream pollution a point of issue among opponents and proponents of a sewage disposal plant for Portland. Granted that other cities and mills outside the Portland area contribute their share to the pollution of the Willamette River, the fact remains that the degree of contamination is greatest between the Sellwood Bridge and the Columbia River. Moreover, were each Willamette Valley community to wait for its neighbors to abate their nuisances first, no constructive measures would be taken.

History of the Sewage Disposal Issue in Portland

Advocates of a sewage disposal plant for...
Portland have raised their voices at frequent intervals for nearly two decades, but it was not until 1933 that definite steps were taken. In the spring of that year a proposal for a sewage disposal system was submitted to the voter following a brief study conducted as an emergency relief project. Although the plans resulting from that study were found to be inadequate, a $6,000,000 self-liquidating bond issue was passed by a vote of 47,029 to 23,395.

Due to several complicating factors, including failure to obtain PWA approval of the plans advanced by the City on the basis of the 1933 study and inability to market the bonds, the bond proposal became dormant and was disposed of in November, 1934, when a plan for using revenue from general taxation to meet deficiencies in principal and interest on the bonds was defeated by a vote of 46,886 to 33,013. However, the idea spread during the 1933-34 campaign that sewage plants could be operated on a self-supporting basis still persists to some degree in Portland.

Within the past three or four years more constructive steps have been taken to meet the sewage disposal issue. A carefully documented report, dealing chiefly with the mechanical, chemical, and biological aspects of the problem, was prepared in 1938 by William C. McIndoe, a consulting chemist retained by the Port of Portland. In the summer of 1939 a Board of Review was convened by the City Council to consider the major points of the sewage collection and disposal problem of the city. The four members of this Board submitted a unanimous report recommending that the sewage 'be collected and transported to a site in the vicinity of the Columbia Slough, there to be treated by sedimentation, and then discharged into the Columbia River through multiple outlets.' The foregoing opinion, outlining the broad character of the disposal system best suited for Portland, was signed by Dr. Abel Wolman, Professor of Sanitary Engineering at John Hopkins University, and three other capable board members. These two reports, and one other (prepared in 1933 under the direction of the late Harrison H. Eddy of Boston in a belated attempt to salvage something from the rudimentary emergency relief study), are all in agreement on the general plan of the sewage system.

The Sewer User Service Charge

On November 8, 1938, the people of Portland voted 64,934 to 45,171 in favor of a charter amendment empowering the City Council, among other things, "To require from the city engineer plans and specifications and estimates of costs for a sewage . . . treatment system . . ." "To construct, equip, operate and maintain a sewage disposal or sewage purification system . . ." and " . . . in order that funds may be secured to carry out the purposes of this act . . . to establish and put into effect and collect as of December 1, 1938, a schedule of sewer user service charges . . ." which "shall not exceed 33 1/3 per cent of the current water charge . . ."

Pursuant to other provisions of the charter amendment, a Sewer Charge Equalization Board was appointed by the City Council on March 8, 1939, for the purpose of "investigating, surveying, and making a study of the use of the City of Portland sewers and recommending to the Council an equitable schedule of rates for sewer user service charges in accordance with the provisions of said charter amendment . . ." Hearings were held by the Board in an effort to prepare a schedule of charges which would be fair and equitable to all classes of sewer users, and recommendations were presented to the Council in the early fall of 1939.

On July 5, 1940, the Council passed an ordinance providing for the levying of sewer user service charges based upon the Board's report. The ordinance requires that revenue derived from the charges be placed in a sewage disposal fund to be used "only for the purpose of paying the expenses of investigations, surveys, preparation of designs and plans, construction and/or maintenance and operation of a sewage disposal system . . ."

The sewer charges fixed in the ordinance average about 14 per cent of the domestic water bills. Statements issued by the Water Bureau carry the stipulated charges itemized and explained in a brief note printed on the reverse side. Current bills emphasize that water rates have not been raised, but state that the charter amendment empowers the Council to levy "a sewer user service charge to provide funds for engineering plans and investigation in the correction of the pollution of the Willamette River." No mention is made of the fact that the funds may also be used for "construction and/or maintenance" as stipulated in the council ordinance of July 5, 1940.

Since the inauguration of the sewer user charges as of August 1, 1940, collections to January 1, 1942, have amounted to $217,834. Payments totaling $43,050 have been made during the same period, leaving a balance of $174,784 on January 1. In its meeting of October 21, 1941, the Sewer Charge Equalization Board stated that "a motion was regularly made, seconded, and carried unanimously, that the Sewer Charge Equalization Board recommend to the City Council that the . . . charges be suspended when the City Engineer certifies that sufficient funds have been collected to pay the cost of completing engineering studies and plans and specifications for a sewage disposal system for Portland."

The City Council, if it adopts the recommendations of its Equalization Board, may be expected to discontinue the sewer charges in the immediate future because the amount remaining in the sewage disposal fund is more than sufficient to meet the cost of engineering plans and specifications (estimated by the 1939 Board of Review to cost $175,000). The charter amendment of 1938 clearly states that although the Council is empowered "To create a board of equalization and define its powers and authority," the "board shall be established for the purpose of adjusting the sewer user service charge." It therefore appears that the Board of Equalization may have misinterpreted its authority in recommending on October 21 that the sewer charges be abandoned.
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. The need of a sewage treatment system for Portland is no longer debatable in view of existing biochemical analyses of the Willamette River at Portland.

2. There is evidence of some initial delay on the part of the Council in levying the first sewer user service charges and in commencing the engineering studies authorized in the 1938 charter amendment.

3. The office of the City Engineer is now prosecuting the necessary engineering studies about as rapidly as possible under existing wartime conditions.

4. Statements currently being rendered by the Water Bureau to its customers carry a partial and therefore somewhat misleading explanation of the purposes for which the sewer user charges are being levied.

5. Although the sewer charges now being levied amount to less than half of the maximum allowed by the charter, schedules of rates appear to be fair.

6. Expenditures from the sewage disposal fund have been in accord with the letter of the law.

7. The Sewer Charge Equalization Board is to be commended for its effort to keep regular meetings at Portland.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Your committee respectfully submits the following recommendations:

1. That the City Council be advised of our opinion questioning the propriety of the October 21 action of the Sewer Charge Equalization Board in recommending to the Council that the charges be dropped when sufficient funds for concluding the engineering studies have been accumulated in the sewage disposal fund.

2. That the City Council be asked to continue the collection of the sewer charges in order—
   (a) to assure adequate funds for the completion of all necessary studies and the drawing of specifications;
   (b) to accumulate a fund to reduce the amount of any future bond issue;
   (c) to keep faith with the voters;
   (d) to indicate to other Willamette Valley communities that Portland is serious in dealing with the sewage disposal problem;
   (e) to provide readily available funds for matching any future federal or state aid which may be available to Portland.

3. That the City Council and the Department of Public Works be encouraged to continue to speed the preparation of plans and specifications for the sewage treatment system in order:
   (a) to be ready to begin construction of the system as soon as materials and supplies again become available;
   (b) to be able to take advantage without further delay of any federal or state aid which may be made available in the post-war reconstruction period.

4. That the City Council direct the Department of Public Works to require the Water Bureau to print a more accurate statement concerning the purpose of the sewer user service charges than the one which now appears on the reverse of the water bills.

5. That the City Club appoint a committee at a later date for the purpose of analyzing any construction and operating cost estimates which may be drawn in connection with the completion of the detailed sewage disposal plans and specifications now in preparation by the office of the City Engineer.

Respectfully submitted,
HARRY A. BROD
FREDERIC F. JANNEY
ARTHUR G. ROSSMAN
WALTER A. DURHAM, Chairman
Approved for transmission to the Board of Governors by T. J. Edmonds, chairman of the Planning and Public Works section.
Accepted by the Board of Governors February 2, 1942, and ordered printed and submitted to the membership for consideration and action.

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SET A NEW RECORD!

Attendance at City Club luncheons has varied in the past 10 years from 37 to 431, but a meeting at which more than 100 members and guests are present has long been considered the rough equivalent to batting .300 in the big leagues. For the past 9 weeks the City Club luncheons have batted well in excess of .300. In other words for 9 weeks straight, the attendance has never fallen below 100 at our Friday meetings.

In only one other case in City Club records has this continued succession of fine meetings been duplicated. That was in 1939 when the same number of "over 100" meetings were held.

If attendance at this week's luncheon exceeds 100, the City club will have set up a new record of prolonged good programs. The average attendance for the past 9 weeks has been 142. In this series so far there have been 5 class AA meetings at each of which the attendance was over 150. With several fine speakers scheduled for succeeding weeks, the Club should continue its batting spree indefinitely.

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AND THIS YEAR?

Motor vehicle use in Oregon soared to new all-time high points during the year 1941 when motor vehicle sales, gasoline consumption and registration all exceeded previous records, according to Earl Snell, Secretary of State, who announced annual figures on these factors today.

Registration in 1941 totaled 435,970 vehicles, an increase of nine percent over registration for the preceding year. Gasoline consumption totaled 297,966,614 gallons, an increase of 14 percent while new car and truck sales totaled 50,641, an increase of 21 percent over 1940.