

Oppression
Means
Nation

THE GRIDIRON

Freedom
Means
Progress

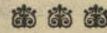
Over which the gold of truth is separated from the dross of error.

Vol. 1, No. 27

LOS ANGELES, CALIF., FRIDAY, June 17, 1927

Single Copies 5c

CIVIL WAR THREATENED



L. A. Faces Water Famine

By ANDRAE B. NORDSKOG

BISHOP, Calif., June 16, 1927. – The many dynamitings that have occurred in Owens Valley over the Los Angeles water situation aroused my interest to the point where I could no longer refrain from going personally to the scene of action to get the low-down on the matter. So, when I went to San Francisco last week to confer with Railroad Commission in our endeavor to reduce the telephone rates in the East Hollywood section, where down-trodden residents are compelled to pay \$17.50 a month for a phone, I decided that I would return home by way of Owens Valley, and thereby save time.

SITUATION SERIOUS

As I entered the valley, I talked with people at Lone Pine, which is just north of the poisonous Owens Lake. At first they were reluctant at saying much about the situation; they claim that there are two or three hundred City of Los Angeles detectives operating in the valley, so they are careful when they meet strangers. When I produced credentials, in the form of newspaper articles from San Francisco and Los Angeles, showing that I was interested in public utility problems and had been fighting for two years for an adjustment of the telephone rates in Los Angeles, they became friendly enough to talk freely. When their hearts were laid bare, they revealed the real tragedy of the matter. It took time to get them to express themselves freely and it was not until I had gone the entire length of the valley, nearly seventy miles, and talked with men and women in every town, that the people in Lone Pine gave vent to their real feelings. In every town the feeling is the same. Going north into the valley we go through Lone Pine, at the southerly end; then Manzanar, Independence, the county seat; Big Pine, Bishop and Laws. Anger that has turned to deep sorrow seems to prevail everywhere. They are determined that Los Angeles shall deal with them fairly. And that they have a just grievance is not to be the text of my message to Los Angeles today; it is rather to arouse Los Angeles to the immediate need of dealing with this problem in a manner that will settle it forever. It is because I can see plainly that unless something is done at once to clear the situation, our great City of Los Angeles is going to have its front yards turned from a velvety green into a desert waste; and if you have not seen the monotony of miles of desert waste, just take a ride across the great Mojave Desert, where the hot sun and burning sands force you to stop at every watering station for a refreshing drink to keep your throat from parching.

NOT IDLE THREATS

Those of you in Los Angeles who think that it is only a handful of unreasonable men in Owens Valley who are trying to blackmail our city into submission, should change your minds. After I have read confusing and contradictory reports for several years, I, too, was led to think that it might have been the work of a few cranks, who were criminally inclined. My personal visit to the valley, where I talked with men and women in all walks of life, visited their homes, and met with them in their places of business, sat at ice cream with them, talked with them on the highway, changed my mind. I am thoroughly convinced that every man, woman and child in the entire valley are in accord on the matter of wanting the City of Los Angeles to make amends for having ravaged the efforts of the pioneers whose lives have been spent in making a veritable God's country out of what was previously a desert waste. Those people, who have seen beautiful farms, wonderful orchards, whose fruits won first prizes at the State apple shows at Watsonville; beautiful homes and large barns destroyed and burned by our Water Board, are not to be blamed if perchance they see the matter through colored glasses. Maybe it is the smoke arising from the burning of their neighbors' homes that has smoked them.

MORE DYNAMITINGS EXPECTED

The very common report all up and down the valley is that the dynamitings of the past have merely been warning that desperate steps would be taken if the City of Los Angeles Water and Power Board refused to settle the matter with them. The aqueduct is more than two hundred miles long; it would take an army of men to guard it; it would entail an expense that would be prohibitive if kept up for any length of time. That there is such a state of unrest among the people of the valley that a new outbreak is feared momentarily is apparent to anyone who knows the truth. That the next time they resort to direct action they expect to destroy the entire aqueduct so that it may take many months to replace it, is also apparent to anyone who is able to get their heart-felt reflections. That they have the sympathy of the entire State of California in their grievance against the Water and Power Board is also apparent to anyone who has seen the editorials that are pouring in from nearly every editor in the State. I saw such a great number of articles and editorials that I could not take time to read them during my stay of several days in the valley; but I will quote a few lines from the pens of other editors in the State.

The Reedley Exponent says: "The farmers of Owens Valley and Inyo County have again attacked the aqueduct of Los Angeles with dynamite, it is said, and no matter what the legal side of the question may be, the sympathy of a large block of the populace of this State will be with the farmers."

Livingston Chronicle says: "It is not at all surprising to anyone who is familiar with the plight of the farmers and business men of Owens Valley as a result of the determination of the great city of Los Angeles to not only ruin, but rule, the little mountain county of Inyo, that acts of violence have come about. The first acts are the dynamiting of the city's aqueduct. That other acts will follow, probably involving bloodshed, is a safe guess."

"Throughout all the ages men have become desperate when their homes have been attacked and wrecked. It is all right for the rest of us to deplore what we term 'lawlessness,' yet were we with our backs to the wall, crying for justice that only seemed to mock us, we, too, would be thinking in terms of dynamite and guns."

Frederick Faulkner, in the Sacramento Union, says: "I experience a sense of failure at having done justice to the story of Owens Valley. It is the most tragic, the most dramatic, real life episode I have ever heard or read

of or been permitted to gaze upon. It is absolutely unprecedented. The municipality (Los Angeles) raised itself above the law. It transported explosives and unlawfully fired them under the storage dams of Owens River irrigationists. Its agents, working in the dead of the night, threw dikes around irrigation canal intakes and diverted water to its aqueduct. The municipality has shown an utter disregard for its promises, its printed word. Its idea of justice has been expressed in a desire for more trees from which to hand those who stood in its way.”

Assembly Committee Denounces Los Angeles

The following facts are reprinted from the California Assembly Daily Journal of Friday, April 22, 1927, and are contained in the reasons why the Assembly committee of eight members, who visited Owens Valley for the purpose of getting the whole truth about the Los Angeles water situation, voted to support Assembly Concurrent Resolution Number Thirty-four; “That said city (Los Angeles) has refused to assume any responsibility for the loss of business suffered by the towns of said valley resulting from the devastation of the lands surrounding the cities and towns of the valley.”

“We seriously condemn the unnecessary destruction of Owens Valley, which is evidenced by uprooted trees, demolished buildings, abandoned schools, etc.”

“We seriously criticize the attitude of Los Angeles toward the towns in Owens Valley which have been unnecessarily damaged and which are facing almost complete depopulation.”

“We deplore the policy of the city, which abandons municipal functions and enters into extensive activities of a private nature, to the ruination of another political subdivision, and admit surprise that such can be legally done, as herein-before set forth.”

“We condemn the precedent here established, which recognizes the right of a large municipality to purchase almost unlimited areas in another and smaller political subdivision, and to dominate and devastate such territory, which results in great embarrassment, damage to, and almost complete disruption of the community life of the smaller political subdivision, without adequate compensation.”

“What has happened to Inyo County, unless steps are taken to prevent a repetition of that invasion, may happen to other rural counties of the state.”

“That said city should proceed forthwith to pay to the inhabitants of said cities and towns in said valley whatever damages they have suffered or will suffer between now and the time of rehabilitation; and if said city shall not proceed forthwith to construct its own waterworks and obtain its own necessary water supply, it should proceed at once to purchase all of the property, except personal property, in said cities and towns, and pay also the reasonable damages for the good will of the businesses in said cities and towns.”

“Also, said city should, if she does not construct her own waterworks, as before suggested, forthwith purchase all of the remain lands located in said valley.”

The foregoing report was signed by eight members of the State Assembly and their names are as follows: Isaac Joes, Orange County; Bradford S. Crittenden of Tracy; T. M. Wright of Santa Clara; Elbert G. Adams of Merced; Frank W. Mixter of Tulare; Robert L. Patterson of Kern; Van Bernard of Butte City, and Roscoe J. Anderson of Shasta.

Valley Demands No More

The Los Angeles Water and Power Commission has repeatedly maintained that no wrong has been committed against these valley people; that they have no right to claim and damages; that they should not be paid one cent by the city for the loss of business. But these people claim that they have suffered almost to the point of annihilation; they claim that the city of Los Angeles should compensate them for this loss; they claim that the water was not taken to Los Angeles for domestic use; they claim that water sufficient to irrigate 75,000 acres of San Fernando Valley land was taken from the fruitful lands of Owens Valley by misrepresentation of the Los Angeles officials; they claim that some of these officials have speculated in San Fernando Valley land and have become rich at the expense of the starving Owens Valley people; they claim that the city of Los Angeles officials have defrauded them and have violated agreements made with them; and for these violations they make demand on the city for just reparation; they only want what they are entitled to, according to the opinion of eight of the most representative legislators in the State of California; they want the city to buy the balance of the property in the valley at a reasonable price. The legislative committee made a thorough investigation just as did the writer; they have recommended to the legislature that Los Angeles make preparations to get water elsewhere and not destroy this beautiful valley, and while I am not going to go into detail in this message to you about the best means by which additional water may be obtained for Los Angeles, whether by lift from the Colorado River at an expense of \$24,000,000 a year, or by gravity flow at much less expense, I desire to say that our great city must take steps immediately to settle this matter with the Owens Valley people, or the city will have a hard time in getting water from any other place. The articles in the Sacramento Union, March 28 to April 2, 1927, from the pen of Frederick Faulkner, in which he denounces the city of Los Angeles Water and Power Commission, and which articles were reprinted in book form by the valley people, had such impression on the Arizona taxpayers that they obtained permission to print twenty-five thousand extra copies for distribution in their own state. This shows how the Owens Valley matter affects the minds of those who have an interest in the Colorado River development.

We Must Act Now

To delay the settlement of this important matter means that Los Angeles is certain to face a water famine. I learned that the entire populace of the valley is not losing any sleep over the dynamiting. True, there are some men up there who have tried to get done by ballot what otherwise they know will be done by dynamite; they know the temper of their neighbors; they know that there are many 30-30 rifles in the valley; they know that many of these men have arranged their affairs, such as life insurance and wills for the protection of their wives and children, so that in case they are forced into a civil war they will be prepared; the writer knows first hand of this condition; he also knows that fear does not bother many of these oppressed souls, whose once green fields of scenic beauty have been turned to scorching desert waste; yes, and when on our trip across the mountains from Bakersfield to the valley we met a man who said he was informed that they expected dynamiting in the valley that night, we learned when we reached the valley that the reason why there was nothing that happened that night was because of the full moon; we also learned that Los Angeles must and it must act now if it expects any water this summer; we were informed that there are men who would gladly give their lives in this battle for justice; we were informed that since the place of their birth and the hope of their future was being rapidly made desolate and uninhabitable, they had nothing left to live for and were therefore compelled to resort to direct action.

Mayor Cryer Must Act Now

To the Honorable Mayor Cryer: - The residents of Owens Valley are in a desperate state of mind; years of broken promises on the part of your Water and Power Commission has ceased to make patience a virtue on the part of these people; Los Angeles is going to suffer immeasurably in event of extensive dynamiting of our water aqueduct; our front yards and our parks will be even as the desert waste as created by our Water and Power Commission in Owens Valley; our throats will be parched if the undercurrent threats are carried out according to what is rumored from one end of the valley to the other; Los Angeles would face a serious fire menace if it is to be without water even for a single day; citizens of the valley who are willing to pay the extreme penalty for the protection of their homes will, in event of civil war, cause citizens of Los Angeles to do the same, thereby causing destruction of home ties that are sacred to wives and children

During the past week I have talked with people throughout the central part of California, from San Francisco to Bakersfield, and they strongly condemn our city for its apathy in this matter.

The citizens of Los Angeles have a right to be protected; they must know the whole truth about this matter; there must be a committee appointed to settle it; the people in the valley will be satisfied if the city appoints one member, the valley people to appoint another, and these two select the third. This committee should have full power to recommend what should be done for the citizens of Owens Valley; the city should be willing to abide by the decision, as are the people in the valley. But, Honorable Mayor, YOU MUST ACT NOW. If and when this outraged people should resort to extensive direct action, human lives shall be sacrificed because of your delay, then the citizens of the State of California, nearly all of whom are in sympathy with the valley people, will hold you responsible. You have the power to act; you can bring about a settlement; you owe it to your city; you owe it to the citizens who live in the desert, which was once beautiful Owens Valley.

In the name of ONE MILLION PEOPLE, the security of whose lives and property depend on your decision, I demand that you act now before it is too late.