

Oregonian July 21-26
Views on All Sides of Current Topics

Need for Clean River

To the Editor: All those who want to see the Willamette river cleaned up appreciate your editorial of July 17 on the sewage-disposal project. It is quite evident that a majority of citizens agree with your statement that some definite step should be taken to stop dumping sewage into the Willamette.

Portland keeps the latch-string out for visitors and tourists. She is complimented for the roses in her yards, but strangers standing on the front steps to view the beautiful setting say her river smells like anything but a rose.

During the summer months with the rising tide there is little current in the Willamette. The concentration of raw sewage thickens at the mouths of 48 sewer openings spreading a stench quite different from the woody odor of a skunk. During the construction of the Burnside bridge laborers very properly refused to work at the outlet of the 24-inch sewer which discharged at that point. Contractors were forced to divert the filth to a point lower down.

The Willamette flowing through the heart of our city should be made a recreational area of great value to the public. City and state health officers warn everyone to stay away from this waterway and avoid the deadly sewage bacteria. This open cesspool in Portland's front yard is a bad blotch on the city's progress.

The Oregon statutes provide that sewage cannot be discharged into our rivers. For years city officials side-stepped the law with the statement that there were no funds to construct a sewage-disposal plant. Three years ago the people of Portland had a special election and passed a bond issue to build the plant. The city council refused to act until citizens carried the case to the supreme court and the validity of the bonds were upheld.

This decision of the supreme court was rendered on March 31 of this year. On the front page of The Oregonian of April 8 was a story to the effect that the city officials would act, and plans for the sewage-disposal project would be whipped into shape by the city engineer in accordance with the decision of the supreme court.

Apparently to sidestep this public issue, the mayor has started in again at the beginning and called a public hearing of all in favor and opposed to cleaning up the Willamette for 10 A. M. today at the city hall. People interested in each side of this problem have expressed the hope that the city council will have the guts to vote either yes or no.

WILLIAM L. FINLEY.

Mr. Woodward's Objections

To the Editor: In your editorial today favoring the proposed \$6,000,000 sewer bond issue, reference is made to the favorable vote of the citizens in 1933. You make no reference, however, to the second vote of November 6, 1934, in which the proposed issue was defeated by substantial majority.

In the first election voters were advised that the bonds would be self-liquidating, which would imply that the government would make substantial gift outright and that a conversion plant would yield profit and carry the cost.

A sewer expert brought out by taxpayer expense declared that the conversion feature was hardly feasible, certainly would not cover the cost of installation. Government funds, if developed, would be in form of a loan, not a gift. Public now understands that the cost of this venture, still undetermined as to the maximum cost, will take the form of service charge against every property or home owner in the city, to run for an indefinite number of years. Many home owners are still paying their assessments with interest for trunk and lateral sewers. This will be an added burden.

You say, "The Willamette river, within the memory of many Portlanders, was pleasant, safe and clean for recreational purposes from its confluence with the Columbia to its upper reaches." The writer, a resident of over half a century, certainly recalls that at

no time within this period has the river been free from malarial influences. We drank the water for many years. Chills and fever, typhoid and other diseases incident to the use of river water were epidemic and only disappeared when Bull Run was brought in.

The writer, with thousands of other citizens, believes that river purification should begin at the source, not the mouth. The mills at Oregon City, the large and growing population, cities and towns along the banks to the south, all play their part in the stream's pollution. Of what possible avail to load the people of our city with a bond issue running into millions for an initial step at the wrong point. What cities on the Mississippi river of a size comparable with Portland have taken such a step—the Ohio, or other navigable streams.

The plans for this proposed venture are general in character. No exact amount has been determined

as to cost. Unemployment grows less serious every day and in any event the project in question will care for but a limited number.

The project in its present status calls for a further and delayed consideration and if carried through let it be a state project, or include the entire Willamette-river drainage area.

WILLIAM F. WOODWARD.