

Consumers balk at electric bills

HARRISBURG (AP)—What common bond exists between a 67-year-old retired state employe from the affluent Harrisburg suburb of Camp Hill and two housewives from the depressed anthracite fields?

Outrage over fuel adjustment charges on their electric bills! Marie Perfetto and Theresa Bordick got lost driving from their homes in Old Forge, near Scranton, to Harrisburg. They had trouble finding the Public Utility Commission office at the Capitol.

William P. Coombs drove over the Susquehanna River from his home. After 30 years of work in state government he had no trouble finding the PUC office.

All three are customers of the Pennsylvania Power and Light Company, the Allentown-based utility which ironically has one of the lowest fuel adjustment charges of any power company in the state.

All three also live in all-electric homes. But they're afraid that the charge the utility adds to their bills to help pay for the soaring cost of fuels to produce electricity is more than they can afford.

Coombs, who founded the Pennsylvania Association of Older Persons in 1969, says his electric bill about every two months runs over \$200. The last one was \$245 with a fuel adjustment charge of \$75. The charge has been as high as \$85, he said.

He says it may eventually cost him his home. "The fuel adjustment charge added onto the increasing bill has forced me to borrow money every time the bill comes due. The only recourse I have is to put my home up for sale because I can't keep borrowing," Coombs said.

His complaint is that utilities add on the fuel adjustment charge without prior approval of the PUC and with inadequate public accounting.

"I'm not out to kill PP and L; don't get me wrong. But I'm not convinced they're doing this thing the way they should. In effect, they're getting a rate hike without PUC approval," he said.

So far, Coombs says he hasn't gotten any satisfaction from the company.

"Sure, I've been to PP and L a number of times. Finally, they sent some guy to my house and he gave me a fairy story. He kept pointing to space heaters and saying they would raise my bill. And I kept telling him that we hadn't been using the heaters.

"I'm not saying their costs haven't gone up. But until there's been an audit, I don't think the electric companies can say they're open and above board."

Coombs thinks the problem is particularly acute for senior citizens.

"We're operating on a very restricted income. The amount of social security we get has never been adequate. And many people don't have the benefit of another pension besides social security," he said.

So Coombs, Mrs. Perfetto and Mrs. Bordick all went to see PUC Commissioner Herbert Denenberg this week. They want him to press for fast action on an investigation of the fuel adjustment allowance.

The women brought along a stack of petitions which they said were signed by 6,581 PP and L customers in Wilkes-Barre, Scranton and dozens of small towns in the northeast.

Mrs. Bordick got the grassroots customer revolt started in January after the Tri-Boro Banner, a weekly newspaper, published her written complaint of the utility charge. Several similar articles in the newspaper brought 40 telephone calls from other customers and a decision to circulate petitions.

The stories also prompted a visit from PP and L representatives to Old Forge in February.

"They gave us a snow job," said Mrs. Perfetto of the meeting. "You had to be a lawyer or an economist to understand their explanation. They should have spoken to us as housewives."

"They told us you have to change your life style" to cut electric bills, fumed Mrs. Bordick.

"I'm using 600 kilowatts less per month this year than last year but my electric bill is higher. How much do I have to conserve? Do I have to turn the heat off? I have two children in my house," added Mrs. Perfetto.

The Bordicks pay an average of \$69 monthly for electricity, \$21 of that for the fuel adjustment charge. The Perfetto's monthly bill is about \$108 with the fuel adjustment in the 25 to 50 per cent range which the PUC says is average.

Denenberg, whose gubernatorial appointment to the PUC still awaits Senate confirmation, sympathizes, as he always has, with the consumers.

"As a just published U.S. Senate study concludes, the fuel adjustment allowance cost to consumers nationally was \$6.5 billion last year, more than the total rate increases of the previous 25 years," Denenberg said in a statement.

Under a new program, the regulatory agency wants: —a general investigation of the allowance.

—audits of the allowance by the PUC staff as well as by the utilities.

—a separate listing on utility bills of the charge; a practice which PP and L and some other utilities have already started.

Kissinger, Ghorbal confer

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger last night assured Egyptian Ambassador Ashraf A. Ghorbal that the United States was determined to continue its efforts to achieve peace with justice in the Middle East.

Ghorbal met with Kissinger after the secretary had had an earlier discussion with Israeli Ambassador Simcha Dinitz.

Neither ambassador would disclose substantive details of their discussions with Kissinger. Diplomatic sources described the nature of Kissinger's assurance to Ghorbal.

Dinitz said his meeting with the secretary was a general review of the new situation in the Middle East and the prospects for the reopening of the Geneva peace conference

between Israel and the Arab countries.

Dinitz said the possibility of a return to the Geneva conference table always had existed but as far as he knew no decision had been made with regard to it.

"However," he said, "we have said on a number of occasions that we do not rule out a return to Geneva. We never thought it would be a particularly effective forum, but a declaratory forum. However, if the situation develops that Geneva is reconvened, naturally we would have to see the thing as it comes."

Dinitz said Kissinger had said nothing to imply he thought Israel might have been responsible for the Middle East diplomatic

stalemate by holding fast to its position. "We had very useful talks," Dinitz said, "and I was happy and pleased to hear from the secretary that the United States is determined to continue its efforts to achieve peace with justice in the Middle East."

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Publicity grounds for legal a battle

Boyle attorneys seek new trial

MEDIA, Pa. (AP)—W.A. "Tony" Boyle, the once powerful president of the United Mine Workers now ailing in a federal prison, today seeks to set aside his conviction of murdering a union rival on grounds that excessive publicity denied him a fair trial.

The 73-year-old Boyle, convicted last April 10 of first degree murder for arranging the assassination of Joseph "Jock" Yablonski, and his wife and daughter, won't be present in Delaware County Common Pleas Court when opposing attorneys make their legal arguments before a three-judge panel headed by Judge Francis J. Catania, who had presided at the

month-long trial. Boyle is in custody at Springfield, Mo., where he is completing a three-year sentence for making illegal political contributions with union funds.

His three mandatory life sentences for murder, if upheld, would be served in a Pennsylvania prison.

The Yablonskis were slain Dec. 31, 1969, as they slept in their Clarksville home in rural western Pennsylvania, about 30 miles northwest of Pittsburgh.

Eight other persons have either confessed or been convicted in the slayings. Special Prosecutor Richard A. Sprague had charged Boyle ordered Yablonski

killed and then authorized \$20,000 in union funds to finance it.

"This man used the blood and sweat of miners for killing," Sprague said after the guilty verdicts which he called "the end of the line" in a case that attracted international attention.

Boyle's appeal for a new trial will be argued by Charles Peruto, like Sprague a former assistant district attorney in neighboring Philadelphia.

"We are going to stress the excessive pre-trial publicity," Peruto said, but declined to give any further details on grounds that the court had imposed a ban on pre-hearing discussion.

Boyle's defense at the trial was headed by Charles F. Moses of Billings, Mont., the state where the defendant had begun his rise to labor power. Boyle, a former coal miner, had headed the 200,000-member UMW for 11 years, succeeding the legendary John L. Lewis.

Yablonski had organized a reform movement in 1969 in an unsuccessful challenge to topple Boyle, losing the election three weeks before he was killed. Now Yablonski's lawyer son, Joseph Jr., is chief counsel for the union.

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UMW complaints force safety director to resign

WASHINGTON (AP)—James M. Day, director of the federal agency that enforces coal mine safety laws, resigned yesterday following along campaign for his ouster by the United Mine Workers union.

Day's resignation as head of the Mining Enforcement and Safety Administration is effective July 1, an Interior Department spokesman said.

Day was reported out of town and could not be reached for comment. However, an administration source said that opposition to Day by UMW President Arnold Miller and other labor leaders was a major factor in the resignation.

Miller has said Day is industry-biased and has failed to aggressively enforce coal mine safety laws passed by Congress.

A holdover from the Nixon administration, Day was appointed to the office in August 1973 soon after it was created to administer mine health and safety standards. Before creation of the agency, these standards had been enforced by the Bureau of Mines.

From the beginning, Day was a controversial appointment. Both the UMW and the United Steelworkers Union called for his ouster, along with a number of coal-state congressmen.

In a statement, the UMW hailed Day's decision to step down and urged that "the new director of MESA be someone with long experience in coal mining and a proven record of commitment to mine safety."

The UMW complained that Day had little experience in coal-related fields when he was appointed to the post.

Day, 44, worked for the Central Intelligence Agency from 1953 to 1959 and was a practicing attorney in Washington from 1959 until 1970, when he was named director of the office of hearings and appeals for the Interior Department.

Day's appointment to head MESA was made without Senate confirmation, but Congress has since voted to put the post under Senate scrutiny.

Richardson has ski mishap

ST. ANTON ARLBERG, Austria (UPI)—U.S. Ambassador to Britain Elliot Richardson and his wife Anne narrowly escaped injury yesterday when they were buried by a small snowslide while skiing on the Arlberg slopes.

Richardson said they managed to dig themselves

out and were not hurt.

"It happened while we were skiing on a slope near here with two of our children and one English friend," he said. "I and my wife were hit by the snowslide, the others were not affected. I did not report the mishap to the authorities."

Austrian police said they

had no knowledge of the incident.

Richardson said he called his personal assistant, Tony Ripley, at the London embassy and informed him about the mishap.

The couple went to Arlberg in western Austria Friday.

Bob Doyle & Buffalo Chipkickers
is here!

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Penn State Invitational Film Festival

AMERICAN LIFE IN FILM

The Magnificent Ambersons (Orson Welles - 1942) Wed. March 26
The story of the declining magnificence of an American dynasty at the turn of the century.

Rebel Without A Cause (Nicholas Ray - 1955) Thurs. March 27
James Dean, Natalie Wood, and Sal Mineo in the classic story of a modern misfit.

On The Waterfront (Elia Kazan - 1954) Fri. March 28
The classic drama of the New York docks; won 7 Academy Awards, including Marlon Brando for best actor.

The Graduate (Mike Nichols - 1967) Sat. March 29
A social satire starring Dustin Hoffman with music by Simon and Garfunkel.

A Thousand Clowns (Fred Coe - 1966) Sun. March 30
An object lesson on love versus non-conformity and a classic comedy starring Jason Robards.

The Misfits (John Huston - 1961) Mon. March 31
Scripted by Arthur Miller, a story of the "modern" west. Starring Clark Gable, Marilyn Monroe, in their last film appearance.

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