

Northeast Pa. Officials Blast Controversial Rail Report

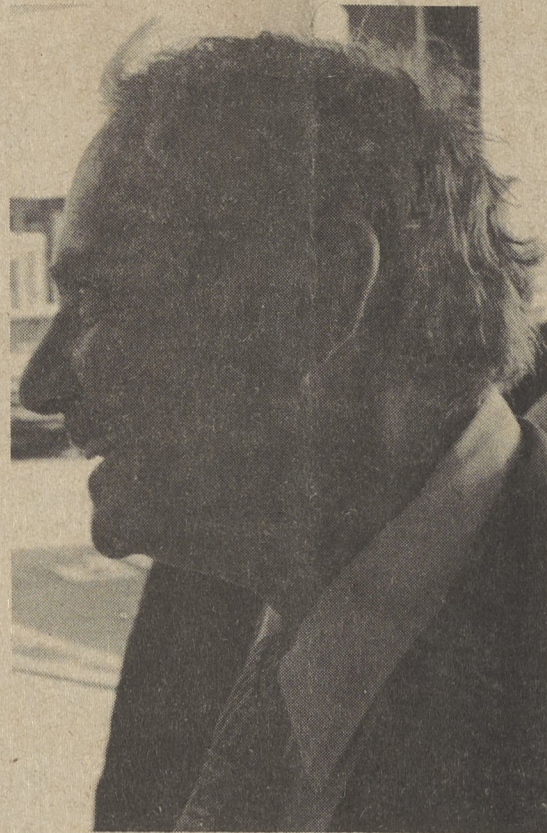
by J.R. Freeman

We are living in a time of crisis. In Washington it's the political crisis; across the nation it's the energy crisis; and in Northeastern Pennsylvania it's the rail crisis. All three mean a change in life style for all of us. But nowhere, perhaps, will that change be more critically felt than here.

Hearings before the Interstate Commerce Commission during the next two weeks are the first step in attacking the rail crisis in Northeastern Pennsylvania and in 17 other areas from Boston and Albany to Chicago and St. Louis. These hearings will partly involve what lies ahead for rail transportation in the East, the results of which will affect the lives of almost half the people in the United States. Though most local residents may not see how they are directly affected by the rail crisis since it involves mostly freight, neither did they think the energy crisis would ever curtail their mobility. They know better now, and they know that what was once so incidental as a tank of gas has now become vitally important. The rail crisis will have no less effect. Neither is it less complex.

ICC Hearing Examiner Judge George Morin began taking testimony at 9:30 a.m. Monday in the Navy Reserve Training Center, Avoca, with Gov. Milton J. Shapp as the first of more than 200 witnesses expected to testify during the week-long hearing concerning a controversial U.S. Department of Transportation report made public last month. The report, titled "Rail Service in the Midwest and Northeast Region," Volumes 1 and 2, was submitted in accordance with section 204 of the Regional Rail Reorganization Act of 1973. It is designed to be used by the new U.S. Railway Association as a basis for revamping northeast rail operations. Ultimately, Congress will approve or reject the USRA-planned system.

Though none of the witnesses were expected to agree with the 1,000-page DOT report, most took stands firmly against it, particularly dealing with the report's conclusion that 445 miles of track be abandoned in the 22-county area of Northeastern Pennsylvania in a reorganization plan for six bankrupt railroads, including the Erie-Lackawanna, Lehigh Valley, Penn Central, Reading, Central



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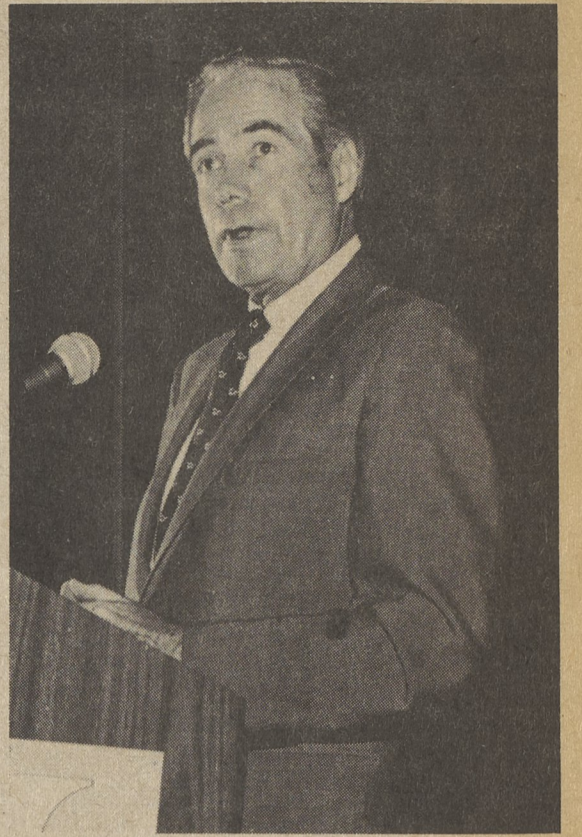
of New Jersey, and the Boston & Maine.

Charging that the DOT report "was promulgated in brazen disregard for the public interest," Gov. Shapp branded the report "totally unacceptable to the people of Pennsylvania" and predicted that "if its recommendations are followed, it will result in severe economic hardship for the Commonwealth."

In a detailed statement, Gov. Shapp told the ICC that the report, if adopted, would "result in a transportation catastrophe of greater magnitude than the wreck of the Penn Central."

Criticizing the data used in preparing the report, Gov. Shapp charged that DOT had used 1972 railroad data. "For whatever reason, DOT ignored the fact that many shippers were disrupted and many miles of rail lines were put out of service for long periods of time by Hurricane Agnes. Here in Northeastern Pennsylvania particularly, this has the result of penalizing once again business as well as working men and women because of a natural disaster over which they had no control," the governor said.

(continued on PAGE SIXTEEN)



William W. Scranton: "The DOT plan...would cut this area off at the knees."

Increased Allocations Aim of Owner Meeting

The long lines of automobiles at service stations have subsided in the area in the past ten days, but the crisis is far from over. That's the opinion of service station owners throughout Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties, and they plan to make their complaints known to local, state and federal officials at a meeting tonight (Thursday) at 8 p.m. in the National Guard Armory in West Pittston.

The meeting, which is expected to attract more than 400 service station dealers and government officials from the Abingtons to Wilkes-Barre, will be chaired by Thomas Anderson, member of the executive board of the Pennsylvania Service Station Dealers Association.

According to George... operator

of an ARCO station in Chinchilla who attended a meeting of Luzerne and Lackawanna dealers Saturday, the group will make the following demands to local, state and federal energy officials:

—an increase in monthly gasoline allocations;

—enactment of a franchise bill now before the state legislature which would restrict the major oil companies' control over dealers;

—a roll back of gasoline prices to their May 1972 level (approximately 37.9 cents per gallon for regular and 41.9 for premium);

—enactment of anti-trust legislation to insure separation of major oil companies and distributors.

Unless action is taken on these demands, Cottell said, the dealers will "consider a shut down starting March 10 or 12."

Approximately 50 dealers in the Scranton and Abington area threatened to shut down last week, then called the plan off.

"We felt a shutdown would not be effective unless it encompassed a wider area," Cottell explained. "If just the Scranton dealers were to shut down, people wouldn't have to drive very far to get gas. If we all shut down in Lackawanna and Luzerne counties, it might mean something."

(continued on PAGE SEVENTEEN)

Federal Program Termed 'Disaster'

Congressman Daniel J. Flood, (D-Wilkes-Barre) in a meeting with the Pennsylvania Congressional delegation and with Joseph Lasala, regional director of the Federal Energy Office, Philadelphia, termed the federal gasoline allocation program a complete disaster and a gross insult to the "all equal under law" concept on which this nation was founded. "Pennsylvania," he said, "is being treated less than equal. I see no reason why we are not being allocated our just due."

Congressman Flood emphasized that his was not a partisan view but one on which all Pennsylvanians are united. Sen. Richard Schweiker (R-Pa.) has already criticized the unfair administration's policy. Congressman Flood declared, "The sentiment in Pennsylvania is strong. My constituents, if treated fairly, have the strength to accept difficulties with quiet courage. Now, however, they are righteously indignant."

Congressman Flood said it was pointed out that Pennsylvania ranks 37th in percentage of gas allocations from the 1972 base while serving a population which is third largest in the United States. Additionally, the Keystone State has the fourth highest total of automobiles in the nation. The congressman continued, "Just as an example of the inequity of the whole situation, Illinois is a state with 6 percent fewer cars than our state, yet received a much higher allocation of gasoline. Another indication of the unjust allocation is further brought home by the fact that many of my colleagues from the Plain States, from the West and from the South West, express dismay at the long lines waiting at gas stations in Washington, saying there is no shortage of gasoline in their home states. Yet the lines in Washington are no longer than they are in my home town of Wilkes-Barre."

Congressman Flood stated his position earlier in a telegram to William E. Simon, director of the Federal Energy Office. He concluded, "Because of inaccurate or incomplete data, the allocation system has failed. The program must be corrected so as to allow an equitable distribution of America's gas supply." Mr. Flood said he would continue to press his demands for fair treatment for Pennsylvania.

2 Police Associations Offer to Back Cooper

The Back Mountain Policemen's Association and the Luzerne County Police Chiefs' Association have recently declared their support of Robert Cooper, former Jackson Township police chief, in his effort to regain his position. The police groups have indicated that their backing will include financial help if necessary.

Ben Jones III, the Back Mountain association's solicitor, is presently representing Mr. Cooper legally. LCPCA solicitor Joseph Giebus has been instructed to assist Atty. Jones in Mr. Cooper's behalf.

Mr. Cooper is seeking the reinstatement of his position which was lost to Don Jones, under the Police Tenure Act, at the Jackson Township reorganization meeting, in January.

Dallas Township ex-chief Frank Lange, president of the county chiefs association, has been quoted as saying that the LCPCA will back Mr. Cooper because no formal charge of wrongdoing was filed by Jackson Township within five days of the reorganizational meeting. The Police Tenure Act, Cooper's supporters maintain, does not allow for the firing, suspending or demoting of a policeman without such formal charges.

At the Jackson Township reorganizational meeting, Mr. Cooper asked why he was being "fired". The township supervisors told him that he was not being fired, but that he was being offered the assistant chief position while Mr. Jones was being offered the higher position. Previously Mr. Jones had been

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Recreation Needs Discussed By Back Mountain Officials

Recreational needs and opportunities in the Back Mountain was the topic of discussion at a recent meeting of municipal and school district officials. George Partilla, executive director of the Luzerne County Recreational and Cultural Enrichment Authority, was the featured speaker at the meeting which was sponsored by the Back Mountain Cultural Center and held at the Kennedy Lounge, College Misericordia. Howard J. Grossman, president of the Cultural Center,

chaired the meeting.

Mr. Partilla outlined the scope of his new agency which was formed following the ravages of Tropical Storm Agnes. The Authority has provided a series of recreational opportunities to many victims. One of the most recent was the opening of the Kingston Army for use by citizens wishing to take advantage of recreational programs.

Officials of the Dallas and Lake-Lehman School Districts, recreation committees or commissions and governing body officials of the municipalities in both districts, representatives of the Luzerne County Community College, Gate of Heaven, Penn State Wilkes-Barre Campus, and others attended the meeting.

Many suggestions were made with respect to recreation needs in the area. Among those strongly urged were the establishment of a community center to serve all Back Mountain residents; additional facilities and programs for

teenagers; a community swimming pool, basketball, baseball, and volleyball facilities; a roller and ice skating rink, and much more.

Ongoing recreational programs being administered by municipalities such as Dallas Borough and Kingston Township were discussed. Facilities such as College Misericordia and the Penn State Wilkes-Barre Campus were also noted as being utilized for recreational purposes in addition to the Dallas School District.

Possible use of experimental programs to encourage family use of the Penn State Campus was noted in light of the energy crisis and the need to utilize local facilities more effectively as the gasoline shortage gets worse.

It was also noted that recreational opportunities were limited at the present time in the Lake-Lehman Area, and that there was a need to maximize the use of all facilities for the benefit of all Back Mountain residents.

(continued on PAGE SEVENTEEN)

Lehman Township Fire Now Determined Arson

One of three arson charges facing a young Forty Fort man is for a Lehman Township fire "on or about" Dec. 10, 1973. George Anthony Golias, 22, of 50 Durkee St., Forty Fort, was charged by Wyoming Barracks State Police fire marshal Paul G. Cotter, with having set fire to fiber glass insulation on the beam of a garage section "of a home...owned by Sarah Ann Cybul, RD 5, Shavertown."

Mrs. Cybul told the Post that the Dec. 10 fire only smoldered and caused no damage. She added that a Nov. 12 storage shed fire at Town and Country Manor, Kingston Township, owned by her husband, Paul Cybul, might also have been set by Mr. Golias.

Mrs. Cybul said that she couldn't go into detail about the case before the hearing, but she did note that Mr. Golias had once worked for them.

Mr. Golias, who is in Luzerne County Prison in default of bail, is also charged with setting fires at the Hy-Art Lamp Manufacturing Company, South Franklin

and Horton Streets, Wilkes-Barre, Feb. 12 and 14; and the Frieder Cigar Company, Mill Street and Gardner Avenue, Wilkes-Barre, Feb. 26.

Mr. Golias was arraigned before magistrate Stephen Stephanides of Swoyersville March 1, following his arrest by fire marshal Cotter, Wilkes-Barre police detectives David Farrell and Edward Cunningham, and Wilkes-Barre fire captains Joseph Lynch and George Soltis. He was arrested at the Frieder Cigar Company where he was employed.

Assisting in the investigation were State Police Lt. Chester Dudick and detective William Berneski.

Mr. Golias is reported to have admitted setting the three fires. He denied, however, having any part in the bomb scares that have plagued the Hy-Art and Frieder firms recently.

Dallas magistrate Leonard Harvey has scheduled a March 8 hearing on the local arson charge. Bail for that charge was set at \$1,000.