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BMPA fights UGI rate hike

Back Mountain Protective Assn. President Dr. F. Budd Schooley this week announced that his group planned to challenge the rate increase proposal submitted by UGI-Luzerne Electric Division to the Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission.

Schooley said the BMPA plans to file for PUC complaint forms and force hearing on the rate hike, which UGI has indicated would total 9.5 per cent over two years.

"We feel we have to make a positive stand to protect the public interest," Schooley said. He said he believed public needed some kind of consumer advocate to challenge all utilities, noting that rate increases are pending with others as well as UGI.

He pointed out that the BMPA was an organizational base on which the taxpayers and consumers could unite. Hearings would follow the filing of a formal complaint with the PUC, according to Schooley.

Attorney James L. Brown represents the BMPA in legal matters such as the hearing.

Schooley also discussed the utilities recent announcement of an increase in dividends paid quarterly to holders of common stock. The company indicated the quarterly dividend would be increased to 35 cents per share, payable March 31 to shareowners of record Feb. 27, 1976. The dividend represents an increase of two cents per share and is the first for company shareholders since an increase initiated in 1972.

Projected to a yearly basis, the quarterly dividend would total \$1.40, a yield of more than nine per cent when compared to the current market price of UGI common stock, now selling for about \$15.50 per share.

Dick Bunn, vice president of the company's energy department, said UGI's board of director decision to increase dividends to shareowners represented a need to adjust dividends to keep up with inflation and to investors in a competitive money market.

Bunn said the rate of return the company is seeking in the rate increase proposal is based not on the

market value of the stock but on the rate base determined by state regulatory authorities to be the depreciated fair value of UGI assets. He said company assets currently have a book value of between \$23 and \$24 per share, considerably in excess of the price determined by the stock market.

The first step of the rate increase proposal, a 5.2 per cent hike, would provide UGI with a rate of return of 710.26 per cent, as computed on the PUC 1972 test year presently authorized as the basis for UGI rates.

Bunn said the company has not been attaining the 10.4 per cent return on fair value allowed by the 1972 rate case with present rates. He said the company is seeking a still higher rate of return on fair value in the second step of the rate increase proposal a 4.3 per cent increase. This portion of the rate increase proposal would seek to replace the authorized 10.4 per cent rate of return on fair value with a rate of return of about 12.4 per cent.

UGI believes the 1972 rate of return is inadequate to attract investors in anticipated money markets. Company figures used to justify the two-step rate increase have been

adjusted, Bunn said, for inflation, reductions in cost of power they purchase, increases in customers, tax changes and other present day conditions.

He said rates of return computed on "fair value" are slightly less than returns actually realized by the company when compared to the original asset cost, returns he estimated at approximately 12.5 per cent compared to the 10.4 per cent figure authorized. Bunn pointed out that regulatory use of either figure should produce the same net dollar return to the company.

The vice president said the company seeks to keep the interests of customers, employees and stockholders in balance throughout rate increase considerations.

Schooley invited public participation in the complaint. He said all Back Mountain residents are eligible to join the association, a non-profit, tax exempt organization with a nominal \$3 per year membership fee.

Interested persons may contact Schooley or direct their membership applications to John Dungey, BMPA Treasurer, Lake St., Dallas, Pa. 18612.



GOURMET—This week's miserable weather wasn't spiteful to everyone as Walter and Patty Bronson of Dallas try a taste of an in-season delicacy.

Area Lebanese out-of-communication with relatives in war-torn Middle East

More than 350 families of Lebanese origin living in this area have relatives in the strife-torn Middle Eastern nation, according to a local clergyman.

"Most of our Lebanese community in the Wyoming Valley and Back Mountain areas are descendants of families who came from Hardin, one of the largest cities of Lebanon. We have over 350 families living in the local area, most of them with sisters, brothers, uncles, aunts, parents or cousins still in Lebanon. All are concerned in one way or another with the Lebanese crisis," said the Rev.

Victor Kayrouz, pastor of St. Anthony's Maronite Church, in an interview this week with the Post.

"The other families come from five other villages in the Batroun area located in the northern part of Lebanon."

According to Father Victor, most of the families' concern is the welfare of their relatives from whom they have had no word for many months. The Lebanese people have been shut off from all communication with the outside world with the exception of an occasional call clergymen are able to make to someone in Europe.

There are eight priests of the Maronite Order in the Scranton diocese. Most of the Lebanese families in this area are prominent in the cultural, social, and business lives of their communities.

Although their primary concern is for the lives of relatives in Lebanon, they are also concerned for the continued freedom of their country. They fear that their Christian brothers in Lebanon may be sacrificed.

The Maronites of the Lebanese mountains were sons of the Crusaders and fought for their Christian beliefs for more than 15 centuries, Father Victor noted, a conflict which is still raging today.

Lebanon, often termed the Switzerland of the Mid-East, has been a refuge for the Palestinians for many years. It is also the country with the oldest city on earth, Byblos, now known to many as J-Beil.

For 300 years, Lebanon and Syria were part of the Turkish Empire and during that time the mountaineers paid as high as three pounds in gold each to buy their freedom from the Turkish army. One of the first Maronite Christians who fought for freedom and became a martyr was Josef B. Karam.

In 1920, the country of Lebanon came under the mandate of France which changed the face of Lebanon. Missionaries, Jesuits, nuns and Christians came into the country and gave the people hope for protection, as their country became known as the "cherished nation". The Lebanese, then and now, lived in overwhelming of the Turks.

The French gave hope and institution to the strife-torn country. Seventy percent of the Lebanese became Christians at that time.

Father Victor described Lebanon as a clean, beautiful land with many

resort areas. "Israel and Syria look at it with war in their mouths."

The clergyman acted as spokesman for the many families in the area who hesitate to make comment to any of the media in reference to Lebanon. They live peacefully with their neighbors in the local communities and have no "axes to grind."

Lebanon was granted its independence from the French in 1943 and the last French soldier left in 1946, leaving the Lebanese free to live under their Christian constitution. At that time only a small part of the Lebanese seacoast was annexed to Syria.

"The constitution was working beautifully until the Palestinians came into the picture," said Father Victor.

Lebanon never fought with Israel although she generally considered pro-Arab because of the respect for Arabian business colleagues and because of the Moslem population within Lebanon. The policy of Lebanon is of much importance in the Middle East because it is the only democratic country open to all confessions and refugees. There are half a million Palestinians in Lebanon and 52 percent of the population is foreign born.

Beirut, with its beautiful modern buildings and utilities, has stood as a living testimonial to the important nerve center of Mid-East and western commerce. The city is sometimes called the "Wall Street" of the Arab world. It is the only place in that part of the world where world leaders met in the exchange of ideological and political ideas from which recently came the political conflict which drove the country into civil war.

Many Lebanese have emigrated from their homeland for other countries at different times during the past 50 or more years.

The first massive exodus was during World War I to escape persecution. Later, only a few people left because their parents had gone and for New World opportunities.

In the 1950's and later, there was a massive emigration because of the Palestine occupation.

Father Victor comes from the village of Becharri in the northern part of Lebanon, also the birthplace of Kahlil Gibran, author of 'The Prophet', and home town of entertainer Danny Thomas. A recent survey done by youth clubs in Becharri indicated that from 1960 to 1970, almost 8,000 people left, most of them going to Australia.

In the Luzerne County Maronite Churches, members of the congregations have held a Freedom of Peace Day of Prayer, and also a nine days of Penitential Prayer for their loved ones still in Lebanon.

In recent months, two local families have lost relatives in the civil war. A young man, a brilliant judge, was killed, and a young business man, both of them from Hardin. They died as martyrs defending their faith, their country and their pride, Father Victor pointed out. Local Lebanese participated in two marches in protest of the Palestinian warfare—one at the United Nations in New York, and the second at the White House.

More than two million Palestinians are living outside of Palestine. Half million these are in Lebanon and are the only ones who are free with human dignity, according to the clergyman. More than a half million are in Jordan and more than three or four hundred thousand are scattered throughout Egypt.

Now the Palestinians in Lebanon are fighting against the "hand that fed them" because they are being pushed by criminal political outsiders, who

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No progress reported in phone strike

A meeting between striking members of the Communications Workers of America and Commonwealth Telephone Co. broke off about 2:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 3 with

no progress, according to a company spokeswoman.

She said that no additional meetings have been scheduled, but that federal mediator Charles McHugh will be in

touch with both sides to set up further negotiation sessions. The 427 members have been on strike since last Dec. 12, with no apparent compromise in the bargaining position of either the union or the company.



ANNIVERSARY—Gate of Heaven Troop 232 of Dallas launches the 66th anniversary of the Boy Scouts. Robert Cartier serves as Scoutmaster for the group. He is assisted by Joe McDonald and Ed Kubasti. Cartier announced a Sunday Mass at Gate of Heaven for any scouts in the area. Those wishing to attend are to assemble in the auditorium prior to the Mass after which refreshments will be served.

Jackson supervisors appoint Kozik

Leonard Kozik, Dallas, was named sanitary inspector for Jackson Township at the regular meeting of the supervisors, Feb. 2, at the fire hall.

Solicitor Blythe Evans was asked by the supervisors to prepare an ordinance for the passage of cable television in the township by Valley Video. The recent advertising of the cable in the township brought forth lengthy discussion from residents present at the meeting. They asked for an explanation on the lines, where they would run, how many homes

were necessary in order to have cable in an area, and other related questions.

Residents of Bonko Road were at the meeting and requested that the township maintain the road. A spokesman for the group stated that the residents will not turn over any of their property to the township in order to construct a road in accordance with specifications for takeover but that they wanted the road maintained as accounted for in the township code. The supervisors directed the township engineer, Ray Radomski to inspect

the road and determine what needs to be done in order for the township to maintain it.

Chairman Fred Fielding asked for volunteers to attend the Bicentennial meeting to be held Sunday at 3 p.m., at the Huntsville Christian Church. The director of the County Bicentennial Committee will speak at the meeting.

Fielding announced that Marle Pawlowski, township planning consultant, will present slides of the township at the March meeting of the supervisors.