

RICHLAND DIVERSIFICATION
(and trends toward centralization)

Statement of Ted Van Arsdol

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Richland Washington

To the INDUSTRIAL REVIEW COMMITTEE of the Atomic Energy Commission:

I understand that the subject to be discussed by members of the Committee today is the possibility and need of broadening the industrial base of Richland.

I believe the geographic setting of the city is highly important in such considerations, because over the long range the city's fate is tied to a large extent with the destiny of the region in which it is situated.

Richland is a part of Washington State, but Washington and the Pacific Northwest are deceptive labels for what are actually distinctive and separate regions. The Cascade Mountains, which bisect the states of Oregon and Washington and prevent most of the westside rain clouds from reaching the eastern territory, have given the interior an arid environment (Richland's annual precipitation is around 8 inches) which has shaped the history of the section to a large degree. Insufficient rainfall for agricultural purposes has necessitated reclamation of the sagebrush deserts in Central Washington to make them habitable for most settlers.

TRENDS IN HISTORY OF THE INTERIOR

The country between the Cascade Mountains and the Bitterroots which separate Idaho and Montana is still sparsely settled but has a lengthy history. The interior has been the scene of some great migrations including the movement over the Oregon Trail, the gold rushes into the mountains of Idaho, Montana and eastern Oregon, and the various treks of early-day cattlemen and homesteaders. Some impressive efforts at colonization are on the record; one of the biggest successes was the reclamation of the Yakima Valley, but there also have been numerous failures. The abandoned hulks of dryland farmers' homes on the "great plateau" of the Columbia Basin were familiar sights before the development of the Columbia Basin Project (now irrigating more than 450,000 acres but far short of completion) and relics of abortive, privately-sponsored irrigation projects are still visible at a number of points on the middle Columbia and lower Snake River.

A rather extensive study of the history of the middle Columbia, The Yakima and lower Snake rivers during the past 12 years has convinced this writer that the two outstanding trends in the history of the interior during the past 150 years have been the following:

1--For most of its history, the inland region has been fighting an often losing battle against the erosion of population and the exploitation of its resources by persons whose primary interests were at other points. To "stay with the country," as many early settlers chose, often required extreme pioneering. The desert area, according to one writer of gold rush times (Angelo in "Sketches of Travel in Oregon and Idaho") who visited Umatilla, a steamboat town about 35 miles south of present-day Richland around 1864, was "the last place anything above the class of a gorilla would desire to live in," especially during sandstorms and when business was dull in winter. One traveler of 1878 commented of Lewiston, Idaho Territory, one of the early important towns of the interior, that it appeared to be the most dilapidated hamlet on the Pacific Coast. "There is no reason for it, except

the want of pride in most of the business people, who make money here and spend it elsewhere. Such seems to be the sole object of all who come here." (San Francisco Bulletin, March 2, 1878). The coastal regions of Oregon and Washington, despite considerable drizzle and dankness, provided a more inviting territory for most early-day settlers. For those who chose the interior, the final result of pioneering too often was total defeat; "Starved Out" and "Broken Dreams" are two of the appropriate labels used for photos of some of these Columbia Basin homesteaders' abandoned ranches, photographed for the Washington Pioneers' Project.

2--The other significant trend in the history of the interior has been the intervention of the government in developments along the Columbia River system. These included the multi-purpose river projects starting with Grand Coulee and Bonneville dams in the 1930s and continuing with a number of major new installations of today. The other leading type of government activity, particularly from the standpoint of developing a population complex on the middle Columbia, was the siting of a number of "wartime" installations here from about 1941 to 1945; these included the Hanford Engineer Works, Larson Air Force Base, Umatilla Ordnance Depot, Pasco and Walla Walla Navy bases.

THE SITUATION TODAY

From about 4,000 before World War II, the population of the Tri-Cities of Richland, Pasco and Kennewick increased to slightly under 60,000 at present, with more in the suburbs and hinterland. There has been a considerable leveling off in growth in the past several years. Most other cities throughout the interior failed to grow appreciably during the past decade or declined in population, and, except for the Columbia Basin Project, there was the general attrition in agricultural populace common to most such areas throughout the nation. While Richland is being maintained with the aid of a federal subsidy and the Hanford plutonium plant continues to be the main support of the entire Tri-Cities area, strong centralizing trends away from this section are evident. To this observer, one of the great losses for this area is the departure of men who would have been leaders here but felt they couldn't afford to remain in jobs they held, in what is basically a one-industry area.

THE POTENTIAL

Potential of this area, particularly the section around the junctions of the Snake, Columbia and Yakima rivers, has been a subject of speculation for decades. Henry Villard, head of the Northern Pacific Railway Company during construction days, predicted that "some day a great city will rise" at the junction of the Snake and Columbia. Early-day land boomers visioned a "New Chicago." In more recent years, the Army Engineers termed the Columbia River Valley the last great physical frontier in the United States (Columbia River and Minor Tributaries, Northwestern United States, 81st Cong., 2nd Sess., House Doc. No. 531, 1950). In 1960, the Senate's Select Committee on National Water Resources, in a publication titled "Future Needs for Reclamation in the Western United States," pointed out that the Pacific Northwest has the largest potential irrigation acreage in the nation (4,420,000 acres); much of this land is concentrated in areas near the Tri-Cities. The publication also states (P. III) that in the Bureau of Reclamation's opinion "the increasing needs for food and fiber and for new economic

opportunities will require the greatest practical acreage of land in the West that can be reasonably and economically irrigated."

WHY SHOULD THIS AREA BE BUILT UP?

1--Decentralization. The major population of the Pacific Coast is being concentrated in a thin strip of coastal area today, in five main centers -- Seattle-Tacoma-Everett, Portland, the San Francisco Bay area, Los Angeles and San Diego, with the heavy stress on the desert area of Southern California. To provide the opportunities for the development of a sixth center, in the middle Columbia region, could be nothing but a benefit to the nation, adding depth and strength to the West, in this writer's opinion.

2--Development of the region's potential. Development of the resources of the interior of the Pacific Northwest will require centuries. The Columbia Basin Project, for example, has been in the process of promotion and actual development for more than half a century, and at present only about 450,000 acres have been reclaimed. This project which the Bureau of Reclamation has termed "man's greatest effort to change the face of nature" eventually will develop several million acres of land that are practically worthless in the natural state or have been used for large-scale dryland farming. I am certain that the prospects of orderly development of all the available resources of the area will be enhanced considerably by several well-rooted urban centers and industries in the middle River Valley, close to the immediate problems.

3--More efficient development of the West's water and other resources is needed. This observer, and, I am sure, many other persons don't agree with the present pattern of development of arid regions of the West, a southern California "mania" which seems to be piling up some tremendous problems for the nation to face in the future. It is extremely difficult to understand the logic of increasing the vulnerability of the huge populations that are building up on the California deserts, in centers that have to go continually greater distances, in seemingly endless progression, for water and other resources. At a Denver meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science earlier this year, Howard Gregor, assistant professor of the University of California's Davis campus, pointed out that the strategic vulnerability of California's principal cities, because of their congestion and peculiar location, is "one of the serious problems" facing the state. He noted that the three main metropolitan areas must "go long distances for their water and fuel, while girdling mountains and hills make evacuation into the interior an almost unbelievable problem." Increasingly heavy emphasis on such strategic industries as missiles, electronics, and aircraft, Gregor said, has further aggravated this vulnerability, especially in overcrowded Southern California. Too many persons clustered in too few areas has given rise to many problems. Seventy-four per cent of the 1960 population, Gregor said, was in the three metropolitan centers already mentioned, which represent slightly more than one per cent of the state's area. Industrial growth and the massive accumulation of autos, again principally in Southern California, have caused serious air pollution. The discovery of benzpyrene--suspected of being a contributing factor in lung cancer--in the Los Angeles atmosphere has given serious pause to state health officials, Gregor reported. Smog is a big and expensive headache for the state too.

The movement of some industries to the middle section of the West's most important river would seem to be a more efficient way of developing some of the West's potential than encouraging the present "lop-sided" movement of population onto the coast of Southern California.

THE ALTERNATIVES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE AREA

General methods for developing Richland area and hinterland seem to fall into two categories.

The "natural process" is one of these choices. Another term for this might be "unnatural process," for if the general pattern that has been followed through most of the history of the interior region is continued, an often-prohibitive penalty will be placed on the people who choose to "stay with the country," to pioneer. A study of history shows many projects in the inland region that started off with great expectations only to fall victims to the tides of change including the pitfalls of centralization. Probably the most striking example of this is the Priest Rapids country just northwest of the Hanford Works where early irrigation settlements have vanished, and the most prominent features now are giant framework towers carrying power via long lines over sagebrush deserts to distant industries, far from the scene of industrial and agricultural developments that the pioneers believed would some day be the natural destiny of the Priest Rapids Valley. Priest Rapids Dam is a leading example of a dam that was constructed with the distant hunger for power getting the stress and the more localized needs such as navigation and reclamation features discarded.

Eventually, in an indeterminate number of years, much of the inland area could be settled to a large degree from the west coasts of Oregon and Washington in an overflow of population. The cattlemen who settled the bunchgrass lands of the interior in the last century migrated out of the Willamette Valley of Oregon, and the first power-producing plant on the Columbia's main stem -- Hanford at Priest Rapids -- was initiated by Seattle and Tacoma men. Those are only two instances of activities foreshadowing further involvements by West Side interests in the interior. But for the present generation to pin many hopes on an overflow from the West seems illusory. The lessons of history in the interior also indicate, at least to this writer, that it would be naive for the area to base its future hopes on a lone plutonium factory. In addition to the centralization toward the Coast, there is the seeming centralization of the "peacetime" nuclear energy toward other centers throughout the nation, as shown in hundreds of news releases, published reports of government hearings and other sources. Residents of Richland who are constructing \$20,000 to \$25,000 homes and investing in business establishments show a commendable confidence in the potentials of the town, but as far as non-governmental "natural processes" are concerned, the situation seems one that could bring a tremendous amount of disappointment, heartbreak and lost investments. However, to be a pessimist publicly does not seem to be the proper approach. Following the assumption that the community of Richland and other parts of the Tri-Cities are on the way to realizing their potential must be the only solution although here is a situation which would seem to the writer to require the most serious consideration by the government, which gave Richlanders every indication by its "disposal" action that the community was headed for a solid future as a "normal" American city.

Action by the government. The alternative to the "natural process" is for the federal government to bolster the economy of this area, to give the people who would like to "pioneer" in this section some kind of an "equalizer" that would enable them to make a decision to remain with the area, using the experience that has been gained here, despite some inconveniences and drawbacks typical of all newer areas. We hear much to the effect that individuals should arrange their own destiny as much as possible, that too much action by the government is distasteful. But the federal government, through its aircraft plant contracts, military installations and numerous other methods, has been a major party to the centralizing trends on the West Coast which many of us feel have been distorted and could leave a large share of the United States population in an overly-exposed situation in regard to lines to water and other needed resources.

To give the Richland-Pasco-Kennewick area a boost on the way to its eventual destiny, through some diversification of industry, so that the people of this area can help to realize some of the possibilities of a great frontier does not seem to be an unreasonable request.

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TREND TO GARGANTUA

(by Ted Van Arsdol in Richland, Washington, Villager, Feb. 3, 1961)

The Pacific Northwest, said writer Ernest Haycox at a regional conference in 1946, "is spiritually not yet crystalized and physically not yet built."

But the patterns of growth have been shaping up definitely here and elsewhere on the West Coast, and some of them have not met with total approval of discerning individuals. One of the worries has been about certain Big City Boom trends.

In 1941 before the war influx to the Tri-Cities a Pasco weekly editorial writer addressed the President of the United States in an editorial in which he pointed out that the strength of the small towns was being sapped by migration to war industries in the biggest cities. "We honestly believe our national effort and stability is being weakened by this policy of piling up the workers and industries in the great cities and draining out all of the vigorous men from the small communities," the writer stated in the weekly Herald editorial that was reprinted by the Christian Science Monitor and other publications.

That kind of talk here was quieted by the war and post-war influx into the Tri-Cities area and some other East Side communities that left a permanent mark on the Tri-Cities. Some of the potential of the mid-Columbia region was realized, but tendencies toward stagnation began to appear, notably the government's decision to halt work on the half-finished Columbia Basin Project by the mid-60s, and the holdback on the Hanford dual-purpose reactor.

Recently the Wenatchee World printed, and the Villager republished an editorial raising questions again about "piling industry on industry, people on people, in already congested, vulnerable centers" of the West and other parts

of the nation instead of spreading the efforts, and noted the possibility of California siphoning off Northwest power to build up its huge population centers.

In Washington State too, the coastside concentration of population and effort has been continued at a booming rate. The 1960 census, for example, showed a population of 1,428,803 in a tier of three counties -- King, Snohomish, Pierce -- an increase of around 27 per cent from the 1,120,448 total in 1950.

In considering the drift toward Gargantua in three or four metropolitan centers on the West Coast, we would like to mention a couple of aspects that interest us:

(1) THE GOVERNMENT'S ROLE:

Whether or not some officials like the situation, the government is deeply committed in the West, and with its tremendous complex of defense plants is a party to the major centralization trends. Recent publicity about the Bonneville Power Administration indicates that the mid-Columbia is going to get some needed help, including support for the dual-purpose reactor.*

The "timely establishment" of the BPA in earlier days was credited by the noted historian Joseph Kinsey Howard with promoting decentralization of industry at that time and retention of the family farm. Howard described the pre-BPA period as follows:

"To a large extent control of the mines, the forest, and agricultural lands fell into the hands of owners living outside the region. Farm and industrial units grew larger, rural population declined, and the region's few urban centers grew. The corporation wheat ranch and the industrial timber user, with ruthless disregard for exhaustibility of the resources and with no sense of community responsibility, replaced the local owner-operator."

(2) NEEDS OF THE ARID LANDS:

We feel that not enough consideration is given to differences in the Pacific Northwest. Too many West Siders generalize about the Northwest -- the stress is on the pine trees and Seattle. If there's any thought about the "cow counties," it's often to the effect that the little unit, the little guy, has to give way for the bigger -- it's the way of the times, they tell us.

But the Pacific Northwest concept as it exists to a great extent now is full of much phoniness. Dan Clark, head of the history department of the University of Oregon, put the issue this way in the 1946 regional conference in Portland in which Haycox and others also spoke: "I have been troubled in mind throughout the Conference by a question -- does the Pacific Northwest really constitute a region in the sense that New England is a region or perhaps the Middle West is a region? ... my thoughts constantly dwell upon the diversities within the Pacific Northwest, whatever its area, which seem to be so much more obvious than the unities..."

(* This hope has been somewhat dimmed by later developments.)

The Tri-Cities, with its river-desert, atomic energy background, certainly has separate problems and destinies from coastal cities, and other inland towns also have individual problems.

Opinions vary on this centralization problem, but we would like to suggest that the mid-Columbia, with its considerable potential, shouldn't be neglected during the build-up of huge "sitting duck" metropolitan centers on the coast. The attack and solution of growth problems in this area could add some real muscle to the West and the nation.