

State Owned Hydro-Electric Development Proposed in California

One of the biggest public ownership projects of recent years is under way in the state of California. If it goes through, California will be the first state in the union to swing into line with Ontario and other progressive states in the up-to-date, large scale development of hydro-electric power under public ownership.

On April 12 the State Senate passed unanimously a bill establishing a state hydro-electric commission, along the same lines as that of Ontario—which is now the largest electric production and distribution plant in the world—under which the municipalities of the state may combine for the purpose of the production and distribution of electrical energy. The bill was originally drawn and sponsored by representatives of the California League of Municipalities and was introduced by Senator Johnson.

Will Appeal to Referendum

The bill was finally defeated in the Assembly after having drawn the fire of the powerful corporation interests. But this has only served to arouse and unify the forces of the state who are already preparing to take the measure to referendum vote of the people. So now the real fight will begin.

State to Acquire Water Power Sites.

On the same day that the above bill passed the Senate a committee of the lower house on irrigation passed, also unanimously, a resolution calling upon the governor of the state to immediately begin action for the acquisition of all available power sites in the Sierra region by the state. This action proceeds under Act of Congress of June, 1920, which threw open for filing the water power sites of the nation and at the same time gave states and municipalities equal right to file with individuals or private corporations. So far practically all applications have been made by private individuals and corporations. Municipalities and states, as usual, are asleep. Present indications are that California may be a splendid exception. For if these measures go through this state will have opened a new era in state action in this country.

Tremendous Possibilities

The tremendous possibilities of this proposed action on the part of the state can hardly be realized by the ordinary citizen. The cost of electric current has been reduced from an average of 9 cents a kilowatt hour to 3 cents in a great many cases by public ownership. But that is only a hint of what can be done.

Electricity Within Reach of All

It costs from 5 to 10 cents a kilowatt hour to produce electric current in small, isolated plants using steam power. Big, combined plants, using water power are producing it for as little as $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cent a kilowatt. The economies of large-scale production are nowhere more strikingly illustrated than in the field of electricity and especially where water power is used.

The last census report on Electrical Industries has a bulletin on Central Electric Light and Power Stations and on page 130 is a table showing in a most remarkable way this great economy in large-scale production. We have taken the above figures from that source.

No small isolated plant, not even municipally owned, can compete with a great combined plant supplying perhaps scores of cities, using water power and thus producing current at a cost of $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cent a kilowatt. And therefore the struggle for the full advantages of public ownership must henceforth assume the form of a struggle for a method of large-scale production. And that can only be secured by station action.

The people of Ontario saw this years ago and have fought their way to the state ownership and operation of the largest electric light and power plant in the world. Norway and Japan have both seen this point and within recent months have had their government engineers here studying the Ontario system. Both countries are establishing very large state-owned hydro-electric systems.

With great combined plants, driven by water power, under public ownership, the possibilities of usefulness, convenience and comfort for the people through the use of electric power are simply wonderful.

POWER PROGRESS IN CANADA

While the increase in power development in Canada in 1920 was substantial, in many portions of the Dominion new installations and developments have not yet caught up with the ever-increasing demand for hydro-electric energy. Increase in power development naturally accompanies expansion of industries. The pulp and paper industry has undoubtedly attracted the greatest attention during the past year, but a large number of smaller industries and the ever-increasing uses of electricity for power and domestic purposes, both in urban and rural communities, are important factors in the increasing power demand. While the total water-power installation of the Dominion at the commencement of 1920 was some 2,500,000 h.p., the ultimate capacity of undertakings, either completed during the past year or under actual construction, will increase this total by some 840,000 h.p. This figure includes the 500,000 h.p. Chippawa development of the Ontario Hydro-Electric Power Commission. Additional projects aggregating some 360,000 h.p. are also under consideration.

The Province of Ontario leads with some 650,000 h.p. in undertakings, which are either under construction or completed; Quebec shows 140,000 h.p.; the Maritime Provinces, 30,000 h.p.; Manitoba, 20,000 h.p.

Undertakings which are projected for the near future aggregate some 200,000 h.p. in Quebec; 15,000 h.p. in Ontario and 20,000 h.p. in the Maritime Provinces, while one project alone in British Columbia involves some 125,000 h.p.—L. G. Denis.