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Tempers Fray But Valley To Hold Mass Meeting On Water

To the accompaniment of fray- to ed tempers, charges and counter-charges last night at Ben Lomond during the meeting of the board of directors of the San Lorenzo Valley county water district, January 22, was set as the time for a valley-wide mass meeting to discuss the coming water bond election February 8.

The district plans to purchase the Citizens Utilities water company.

The session reached a climax when it was revealed that (1) Board Chairman Harold Hilton was opposed to the purchase of the water company for public ownership, and (2) that he owned and operated a water company of his own which served a number of customers within the water district.

The meeting proceeded orderly enough until a letter was read from the Valley Chamber of Commerce, offering to conduct meetings to advance the cause of the water bond election.

Director Earl Lyon moved that the valley chamber and the Valley Property Owners' association hold meetings for the instruction of the public and that a representative from Ernest Wilson's office be on hand to answer questions.

The motion was seconded by W. S. Kewer.

Sherrod Davis, an attorney from the legal firm of Kirkbride, Wilson, Hartzfeld, and Wallace, said that a brochure was being prepared by his office to send out to some 2000 eligible voters in the district.

Lyon wanted to know just when the directors would have an opportunity to approve the brochure, since no more meetings were scheduled prior to the election. He added that he understood that some valley clubs had offered to aid in the mailing, etc.

Mrs. Calla Field, president of the San Lorenzo Valley Property Owners' association, revealed then that she had contacted Wilson and that January 22 at 8 p.m. in Park hall, Ben Lomond, had been selected as the time for a mass meeting, when Wilson could be present.

Kewer pointed out that another meeting should be held in Boulder Creek.

Mrs. Paddy Smith, one of the persons selected by the chamber to attend last night's directors' meeting, said that it was felt that no definite plans regarding meetings could be held until the approval of the board of directors of the water district had been received.

"From a technical standpoint, the board has done all it can, and now it's up to the civic groups to promote this thing," Hilton stated. "As far as the board is concerned, it's my opinion it's in a strictly neutral position," he added.

"We feel the board should be with us when we hold these meetings," Mrs. Smith said.

"I don't agree with your statement saying whether we're for or against the bonds," Lyon said, turning to Hilton. "We've already said we're for it by calling the election."

"No one has ever endorsed it," Hilton countered.

"By calling an election, it means we've endorsed it," Lyon repeated.

Mrs. Alice Wilder stated that if the board hadn't endorsed the \$800,000 revenue bonds, then it had certainly wasted a lot of the taxpayers' money thus far.

"There seems to be a lot of confusion on the part of some people," Hilton stated. He said the board was elected to do something about the water supply, and that pressure had been brought

to bear to get something done.

He stated that none of the directors felt qualified to make a report of the situation so Engineer John Luthin was hired and subsequently Attorney Wilson.

"None of us has any personal or private opinions," he said. "The board did what it thought it was expected to do, and we did authorize the bond issue, not according to our individual ideas, but based solely on the two reports of the engineer and the attorney. But as far as endorsing it, I've never heard of that," he concluded.

"Do you mean that as an individual, if you were not for it, you'd vote for it as a member of the board?" Lyon asked Hilton.

"Sure," Hilton replied.

"That's misleading the people," Lyon replied.

"What I think is my business," Hilton countered.

"Well, the board hasn't finished its job—it should follow through and request these mass meetings," Lyon went on.

"You plan to contact Wilson, then call a special meeting to go over the brochure, and then Wilson will have the proposed material mailed out, and made available to the public, is that right?" Mrs. Wilder asked Hilton.

He signified that it was.

An unidentified man in the back of the room said he'd like an expression of the individual opinion of each member of the board of directors as to the revenue bond issue.

"I'm for it," both Kewer and Livermore said. Lyon had already expressed himself.

"What about you, Ernie?" Mrs. Wilder asked Ernest Locatelli.

Locatelli said he was waiting for the brochure before he'd commit himself.

"Well, I'm not," Hilton suddenly announced.

"Does that mean that you're going out again as a tax emergency group to fight the bonds?" Mrs. Wilder asked. She was referring to the last bond election, which was defeated by the tax emergency group, in which Hilton was active.

"No, I'm not," he answered.

"In other words you won't organize a taxpayers' group against the bonds like you did before?" Mrs. Wilder pursued.

"No," Hilton replied.

Henry Liebenberg advanced toward Hilton from the audience. "I don't see why you should sit as chairman or as a member of this board of directors—before the election you came out as being opposed to public ownership of water companies," he reminded Hilton.

"I haven't been able to see it as a logical business proposition," Hilton said, citing a few of his objections.

"You're saying things against the bonds because you want to scare the people to death," Lyon charged.

"It doesn't say taxes can't be levied in addition to the revenue bonds," Hilton said, still voicing his objections.

"Mr. Hilton," said Kewer turning to him following a remark from the audience, "Do I understand that you own a water company?"

"Technically, yes," Hilton replied, "and I go behind about \$3500 a year—a wonderful business."

He explained that after buying a water company so he could "water his garden", residents of the Robin Hood Retreat tract persuaded him to run a line up the hill for them—that there were about 2 customers on this line.

He also said that he supplied water to residents of Riverside

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