

The Alliance Herald
TUESDAY AND FRIDAY

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PROSPECT AND RETROSPECT.

Few of us have many kind words for the year that passed out at midnight Saturday. It hasn't been the best year in history, but it hasn't been the worst, by a long shot. Marking, as it did, the first painful steps toward normalcy, it was inevitable that the readjustment should bring some hardships. All of us have been called upon to do our share toward getting the country upon a sound basis—some of us have perhaps had to do a bit more than our share—and to none has the experience been delightful. Merchants and business men have had to dispose of surplus stocks at a partial loss, due to the buyers' strike, which is now happily ended. Laboring men have had to take the lead in the march to normalcy, for wages, always the last to rise, are the first to go down. The buying public, which had spent its money like drunken sailors during the war, first grew thrifty, and then ceased buying altogether. This, with surplus stocks on hand in every store, resulted in a shutdown of industry. With the closing of factories, unemployment became a problem. But the old year which has just passed on has, for the most part, brought something for everything it took away, and will when we look at it later with calm, unprejudiced view, be found to have been as good as the average.

The buyers' strike and the Ku Klux Klan are now things of the past. Liberty bonds have come out of the dumps, after most of the small investors had been compelled to part with these securities. Business is getting to a more solid footing. Prices are stabilized. Demand is increasing and factory wheels are turning again. Wages, too, are stabilized. Danger of a railway strike is averted, for the time being, at least. Labor has shown a commendable disposition to take its medicine, just as capital has been forced to be content with smaller returns.

The bad effects of the war are slowly passing away, for the most of us. Taxes, which reached one of the highest points in history, have challenged public attention, and retrenchment in public expense will follow, and will follow soon, if indications are to be trusted. Public interest has been directed toward governmental affairs, and it is safe to predict that voters, for the next few years at least, will pay real attention to the men they elect to office and will insist on strict performance of pledges. If 1921 accomplishes nothing more than the impressing of a sense of responsibility on the average voter, this alone marks a tremendous achievement.

The land and sea forces of the United States government have been reduced. Appropriations for their upkeep will hit the toboggan next. The disarmament conference, while more or less of a failure, has demonstrated that in time the world may hope for a diminution of the financial burden of war—a senseless burden, at this stage of the world's development.

At home, here in Alliance and Box Butte county, the year that has passed is one of progress. Alliance has installed a city manager form of government, which is giving the city a business administration, and is attracting favorable comment from all over the state and in many places over the nation.

The past year has marked the end of a road war between Alliance and the county commissioners. The coming twelve months should show substantial progress in road building. A definite program has been outlined, providing for both through roads and a system of feeders, and 1922 should see this program started.

The potash industry struggled hard to maintain its footing, but made its bow and retired behind the curtains. It may never return, but instead there is a search for oil that may bring even greater wealth to the community.

There have been forward strides in law enforcement. The year 1921 arrived just at the conviction of Evelyn McElhanev for murder. This was the signal for strict law enforcement. Alliance and Box Butte county have been the leaders in western Nebraska. The booze ring has not been cleaned out, but it's getting to be a poorly paying game. The fellows who were making big money in pandering to the appetites of the boozing consumers are finding that it doesn't pay. They are going the way of the check writers,

who have given Alliance a wide berth, for the most part. Other towns in the county are being cleaned up. Before long, at this rate of progress, sellers of moonshine will do business outside the county. Alliance and Box Butte have been singularly free from lawlessness and crime. Other cities similarly situated have talked of a "wave of crime," but it has not been in evidence here.

Last, but by no means least, there is being built up a feeling of friendliness between Alliance and the surrounding rural territory. Many factors have contributed to this, from the whole-hearted assistance given in a disastrous prairie fire to a community Christmas tree. There has been a genuine endeavor to iron out all differences and where there is sincerity in such an endeavor, it is bound to succeed. When there is genuine co-operation between city and rural communities, Box Butte county will find no project too large to put over.

Take it by and large, 1921 was a pretty fair year. It had more than its share of reverses, but it has had some notable victories and a few pleasant surprises. With a brighter outlook for the cattlemen and the farmers, and the prospect of enough work to go around, 1922 should be an improvement. At least, we are willing to give it every opportunity to beat all existing records. Normalcy, judging by the distance we've traveled, cannot be so very far away.

THE PHONE PLOT THICKENS.

It has been months since the Alliance public has been so stirred over anything as it is now over the efforts of the Northwestern Bell Telephone company to increase its rates. The telephone company has not been in good favor in Alliance for years and years—ever since the railway commission raised rates above those set forth in the old franchise—and it has made mighty few friends since that occasion. Telephone service in Alliance, it must be conceded, it pretty good, on the average. The rates are not the highest in the state. The men who have been sent here to transact business with the telephone subscribers have been a bunch of fine fellows, who have made a lot of friends for themselves, but these friends do not carry this fond regard to the point where it takes in the company.

That's about the situation now. The average telephone subscriber doesn't care particularly about the amount of the 10 per cent surcharge, or even the 10 or 15 cents in excess of that. If the money were to go to his church, or his lodge, or his union, or his club, it wouldn't cause a moment's hesitation. Butter, or eggs, or meat, or clothing, or any one of a dozen necessities could advance in price 10 per cent and it wouldn't call forth a howl of protest. Even the proportionately greater increase in freight and passenger rates, already too high for comfort, didn't cause one-tenth of the actual ill feeling that has been engendered against

the Northwestern Bell Telephone company.

It would be a difficult thing to say just what is responsible for this attitude on the part of the public. There have been a number of contributing factors, of course. Every member of the council and nine out of ten of the people who were telephone subscribers at the time the railway commission first raised rates higher than the figure named in the franchise, looked upon the company at this time as an agreement-breaker, and most of them are of the same opinion still. Others are peeved because the company, during the time the last franchise was being held up, adopted a "do nothing" attitude, and refused to make extensions. Others disliked the way the company representatives talked when they appeared before the council. Still others dislike the company much as the poet conceived a dislike for Dr. Fell, and are just as willing to tell the world.

But, no matter why the telephone company is disliked and mistrusted, the fact is that the people of Alliance in general seem to dislike the corporation. Perhaps an even stronger word might be used. It seems impossible to change an opinion that has been held for years. The present city council endeavored to put an end to this ancient grudge by giving the telephone company a franchise. It is the only franchise of its kind in the state, and contains more concessions than any other city has ever been able to get, but the public, although it said nothing at the time, doesn't like it.

The last application for an increase in rates was the last straw. The state railway commission has granted permission to retain the 10 per cent surcharge until a hearing to be held within the next thirty days. Unless the commission should break all precedents and order a reduction in rates, it seems inevitable that trouble will result. Just what form this trouble will take is a matter of conjecture. At other cities in the state, which seem to love the telephone company about as much as Alliance, there is talk of patrons' strikes. These damage the company, undoubtedly, but they are remarkably inconvenient and unsatisfactory for the patrons. There are some in Alliance who are talking strike.

Others have another solution, which may, in the long run, prove to be the only way to secure peace. Some of the men who dislike the company have suggested that a county telephone company be organized. These men say that it will be possible to get practically every subscriber to the Alliance exchange to agree to patronize a local company. With this sort of backing assured, they believe the Bell people will be willing to sell. Certainly they should not object to getting rid of an exchange that is not making sufficient money on the investment. Nor is the county telephone company infeasible. Hamilton county has such an organization, which has found it possible to furnish good service at rates that are

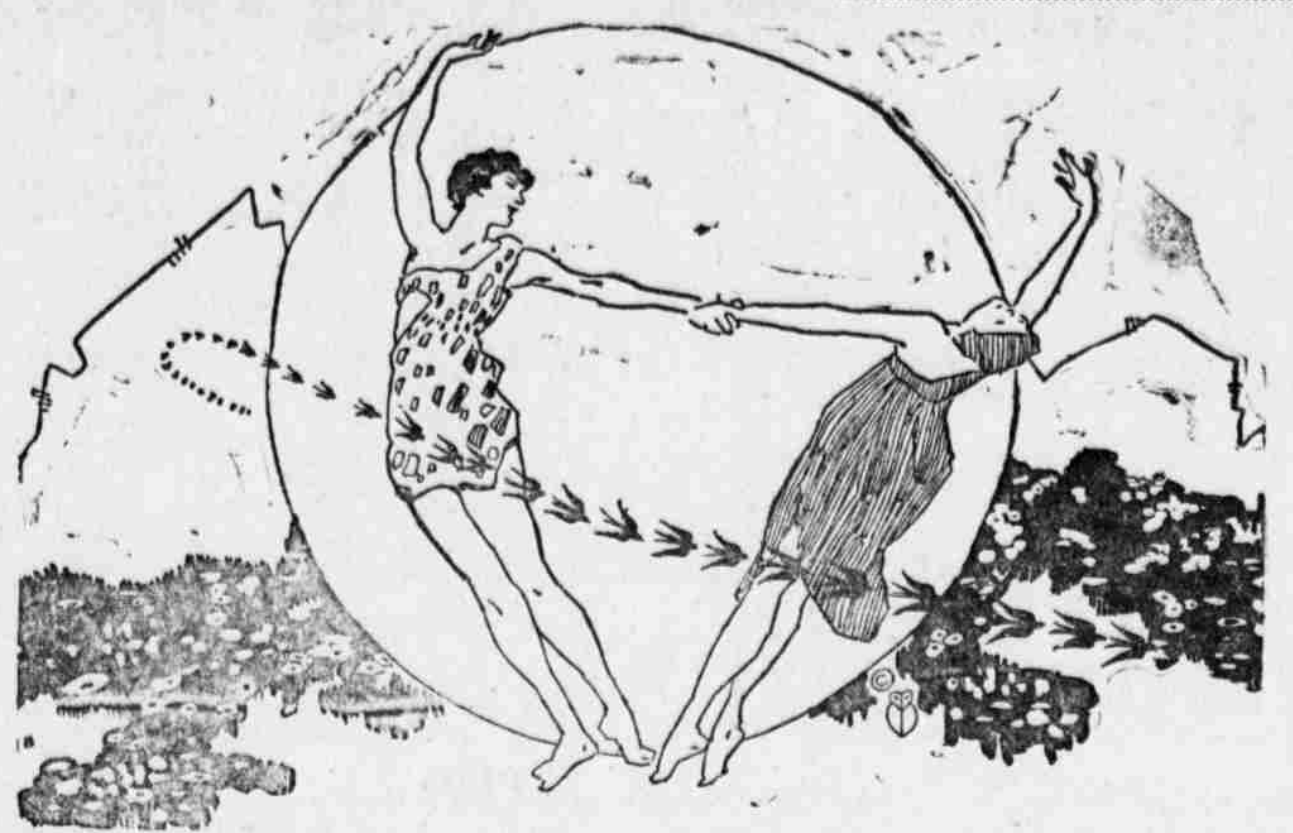
considered fair by the subscribers. The Hamilton county association serves seven or eight smaller towns in addition to Aurora, as well as a large number of farmers. At Aurora the Bell company fought the independent concern, but it was a losing fight and they soon retired from the field.

Of course, these are but conjectures. The state railway commission may see the light. During the hearing last week, the commissioners showed, by their questions and their decision, that it was up to the Northwestern Bell to

make a satisfactory showing, and that the days of easy money are a thing of the past. The commission's own experts introduced damaging testimony which showed that the operating expenses for the Bell company per station, or telephone, were 33 per cent higher than for the Lincoln Telephone & Telegraph company, which serves cities south of the Platte. There were also searching questions concerning the large depreciation fund. Other cities served by the Northwestern Bell have been given access to figures of

the company in order to fight the increase. It looks, to one who is optimistic, as though it were just about time for a subscribers' inning.

If not, there will be plenty of time for anger to cool and vexation to wear itself out. If the patrons cannot become reconciled to continued high rates for the company, the county telephone organization will be found a much more sensible solution of the long standing war than any strike, and much less wearing on the nerves of all concerned.



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