

**ORIGINAL**

BEFORE THE RAILROAD COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Thos. Auld et al.,	)	
	)	
Complainants,	)	
	)	
-vs-	)	CASE NO. 1262.
	)	
Bernard H. Steffen, doing	)	
business under the name and	)	
style of CHICO VECINO	)	
WATER COMPANY	)	
	)	
Defendant.	)	

Lon Bond & Deirup & Deirup & Sam'l J. Nunn  
 for complainants.  
 Bernard H. Steffen in propria persona.

By the Commission,

O P I N I O N

This is a proceeding brought by forty-nine consumers of water for domestic purposes against Bernard H. Steffen, who owns and operates a water system known as Chico Vecino Water Company.

The complaint alleges in effect, that defendant owns and operates a public utility water system, doing business under the name and style of Chico Vecino Water Company, selling water to the inhabitants of a district adjoining the City of Chico, known as Chico Vecino; that service rendered by defendant is inadequate and insufficient in that defendant delivers an insufficient supply of water to meet the needs of his consumers; that the facilities for service have not sufficient capacity and that by reason of the inadequacy, service is intermittent, and prays that the Commission investigate and direct defendant to install adequate facilities.

No answer was filed but defendant at the hearing made an oral answer under oath, admitting the poor service but denying the reasons therefor alleged in the complaint.

A public hearing was held by Examiner Westover at Chico.

Water is obtained from three shallow wells located in different portions of the district served. Water is lifted from these wells into storage tanks and thence distributed throughout the district in iron and steel pipes to some 260 consumers.

Defendant admits that service has been intermittent which, he claims, is due to excessive use and waste of water by the consumers and the partial failure of his water supply because of the extreme drought which has affected the water supply of the entire State and in his opinion there is sufficient water available for his consumers if no water is wasted by them. He has however, constructed a new well which he now reports is yielding a large quantity of water. This, in his opinion, will be sufficient to furnish all the water desired by consumers even though the use is excessive. Defendant claims that his consumers have intentionally permitted taps to remain open thus wasting water and preventing other consumers not so favorably located from receiving an adequate supply.

Testimony of the various consumers shows, that service has been very poor and intermittent and that defendant has been very careless in his methods of operation and discontinued pumping at times when there was need of water. It also appears from the evidence that defendant has been very arbitrary in his dealings with his consumers which caused much illfeeling and undoubtedly is one reason for the claimed excessive use by consumers. We desire to impress upon defendant that an operator of a public utility water system must deal courteously with his consumers and use his best

endeavor to obtain co-operation. These arbitrary methods must cease and steps be taken to improve service.

Water pressure has heretofore been so low that when consumers were irrigating lawns, it was impossible to obtain water from taps within the houses. This, in our opinion, is due to the fact that the tanks are at an elevation of only 40 feet above the district served, which elevation is insufficient to produce pressure, necessary to force a sufficient quantity of water through the mains to supply the draft. The engineers of our Hydraulic Division report that upon the day of their investigation, the pressure was approximately 20 pounds and consumers stated that service was exceptionally good. This was due to the fact that water was being used from one tank at an elevation of 80 feet above the district served. Defendant states that the valve connecting this tank with the system was inadvertently left open, thus causing the improved service. From this, it is obvious, that if the remaining tanks were raised to the same elevation as the one above referred to, service would be much improved and satisfactory pressure obtained.

The so-called Bidwell Plant which past operations show has a plentiful supply of water is now operated irregularly. It is started by employees and continues in operation until the tank is filled at which time it automatically shuts-off. With the present equipment, dependence is placed upon employees arriving at the plant at the time when the supply is exhausted to start the pump. This is very uncertain and in order to make this supply continuous an automatic cut-in should be installed making the operation of this pump entirely automatic.

Defendant, sometime since leased what is known as the McFeely plant and pipe system and supplied consumers from that plant.

This plant was leased without the authority of this Commission. The McFeeley Nursery, the largest consumer supplied from that plant, uses large quantities of water and seriously interferes with the supply received by the consumers. In view of the present water shortage, arrangements should be made that this large consumer irrigate at periods of the day other than those of maximum draft by domestic consumers. This will lessen the peak load and work for improved service.

Water has heretofore <sup>been</sup> and is now being delivered <sup>largely</sup> under a flat rate schedule of rates which invites waste of water by consumers and is uneconomic. Large unregulated demands and careless use of water causes a large variation in consumption and a large peak load, thus making for poor and intermittent service. This is, undoubtedly, one of the principal causes of the present poor service. Extensive investigation throughout the State discloses that poor service <sup>frequently</sup> goes hand in hand with the delivery of water under flat rates. We believe that the only equitable method of distributing water and charge therefor is by a metered system, under which each consumer pays for the quantity of water received, thus giving him an inducement to conserve.

Complainants claim that the quantity of water available for distribution is insufficient to meet their needs. The evidence discloses that the company has been delivering approximately 425,000 gallons a day or 400 gallons per capita which experience in similar localities shows is more than sufficient to meet the needs of the consumers. Apparently poor service has been due to a demand for large quantities of water within short periods, lack of

sufficient pressure to force water into the houses when lawns and gardens are being irrigated and failure of defendant or his employees to put pumping plants in operation when the available water supply in the tanks becomes low.

Under the flat rates now in effect large quantities of water are wasted by some consumers, which waste seriously affects the service of all consumers. Those wasting water are working injury to their neighbors rather than to the water company. Care should be exercised by all consumers to eliminate waste to the end that service to all will be improved.

#### O R D E R

Public hearing having been held in the above entitled proceeding and the matter having been submitted and being now ready for decision,

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that Bernard H. Steffen install within thirty days from the date of this order the following improvements:-

1. Raise the tanks now at an elevation of approximately 40 feet above the ground to an elevation of approximately 80 feet.
2. Install automatic cut-in at Bidwell's plant.
3. Establish periods of irrigation during which the McFeely Nursery is supplied with water

