

THE BATTALION

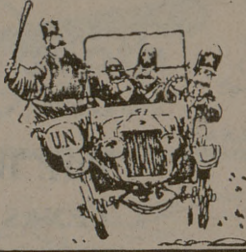
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Miners vote today on new contract, officials hopeful

WASHINGTON — Striking miners are voting today in coalfield union halls on whether to end the 109-day-old walkout against the soft coal industry amid reports of a easing energy crunch and increased economic hardship on miners' families. It was the second time the 160,000 miners cast such ballots. The first pact, on March 5, was rejected by over 70 percent of the membership.

President Carter, after the miners' rejection, invoked the Taft-Hartley Act and a federal judge ordered the miners to return to work. Miners defied the order and eight days later the same judge refused to extend that made the nation's longest continuous nationwide coal strike legal again.

Results were being telephoned to a headquarters in Washington for tabulation. West Virginia Gov. Jay Rockefeller encouraged strikers Thursday to ratify the contract, telling a news conference rejection might force him to revive earlier plans to offer 20 percent of the state's work force.

"I'm hopeful the contract can be ratified tomorrow," Rockefeller said at a news conference. He said when the vote is tallied, West Virginia will either be greatly benefited or greatly set back.

Former UMW Secretary-Treasurer Patrick Thursday predicted the contract will be ratified "by a very narrow margin."

A lot of people have been very hurt financially," he said.

Voting began amid scattered incidents in coalfields. Two cars were fired upon in Boone County, West Virginia, including an

empty car rented by CBS News crew. Police reported no injuries.

In Pennsylvania, police said a group of men believed to be strikers set ablaze a device used to unload coal cars. And, two UMW officials predicted the collapse of national bargaining in the industry if miners reject the pact.

In the March 3-5 balloting about 120,000 of the strikers voted. Latest UMW figures Thursday, for all but 24 locals, showed the vote 32,764 in favor of the contract, and 76,240 against on the first proposal.

Wages were not an issue. Miners appeared satisfied with a boost from \$7.80 per hour to \$10.20 per hour — a 37 percent hike — over the three-year term of the proposal. That part remained unchanged from the rejected contract.

The Bituminous Coal Operators Association, however, made several major concessions, including dropping demands for a work stability clause to punish miners for engaging in wildcat strikes; and reducing the amount miners would have to pay for medical bills from \$700 in the rejected contract to \$200.

That, however, did not satisfy many miners, who want a return to a system that would pay all bills for doctors' visits and drugs.

There also were objections to a disparity between payments to retired miners under the 1950 and 1974 pension plans, and to a production incentive clause put into the new proposal. That would allow mining companies, if the affected union locals agreed, to pay bonuses to miners who produce more coal than a set amount.

Student turnover produces utility bill problems for city

BY DERRICK GRUBBS

The question consumers most often ask when receiving their utility bills is usually "Why's it so high?" Although the billing department cannot solve the problem of high prices, they can remedy many other problems that may arise concerning utility billing.

College Station City Manager North Bardell points to the city's highly-transient population as one reason for the problems that come up in billing.

"Because of the large number of A&M students that move in and out, there is a tremendous amount of turnover in ac-

counts. We try to keep up with all of them but our system isn't infallible," Bardell says.

With the increasing number of students comes an increased membership to the College Station utility consumer list. The population of the city has grown 230 percent in the past eight years and Bardell says this creates problems which are compounded by the recent energy crisis.

Beginning this year, electric utility meters were installed in all apartment complexes in College Station. This makes the city responsible for 10,000 meters every billing time.

To help deal with this increase in billing, last spring College Station brought in computers, a move intended to decrease the time involved in billing. But it does not necessarily decrease the chance of error.

"Some people think the computer is perfect, but it's still humans that are responsible for it getting the correct information to process," says Roland Davie, head of data processing for College Station.

"Right now, we're using a process called cycle billing where we bill the customers four times a month," he says. "Billing for the first cycle is the second Monday of each month, cycle two the third Monday, cycle three the fourth Monday, and the fourth cycle billing goes out the first Monday of the following month."

Although utility bills are sent out according to this schedule, there is still the initial step of reading the meters and determining who owes what.

The meter readers in College Station are assigned to cover certain areas on certain days. The readers log each meter on their beat in books which are turned over to the utility clerks.

The clerks work up the books to determine, for example, which accounts are being terminated. That is, if a customer is moving from College Station he should be

taken taken off the list of utility clients. These people are usually given six weeks to pay their final bill after turning in a change of address.

One particularly sensitive problem — as might be expected — are bills that are delinquent. A customer generally is allowed 10 days, or until the following cycle on the billing schedule, to pay a utility bill. If they have not paid after this period, the individual is put on a delinquent list and notified. From there, it becomes a personal matter between the client and the utility company.

Davie says problems also can arise in processing the bills, and mistakes are not always the fault of the computer.

However, he says the optimum goal of the city's billing department is minimizing the number of errors.

"We usually catch any big mistakes," he says. "Before we send out the bills, we cross-check them carefully so that if there are any obvious errors, we can get them straightened out before we mail the bill."

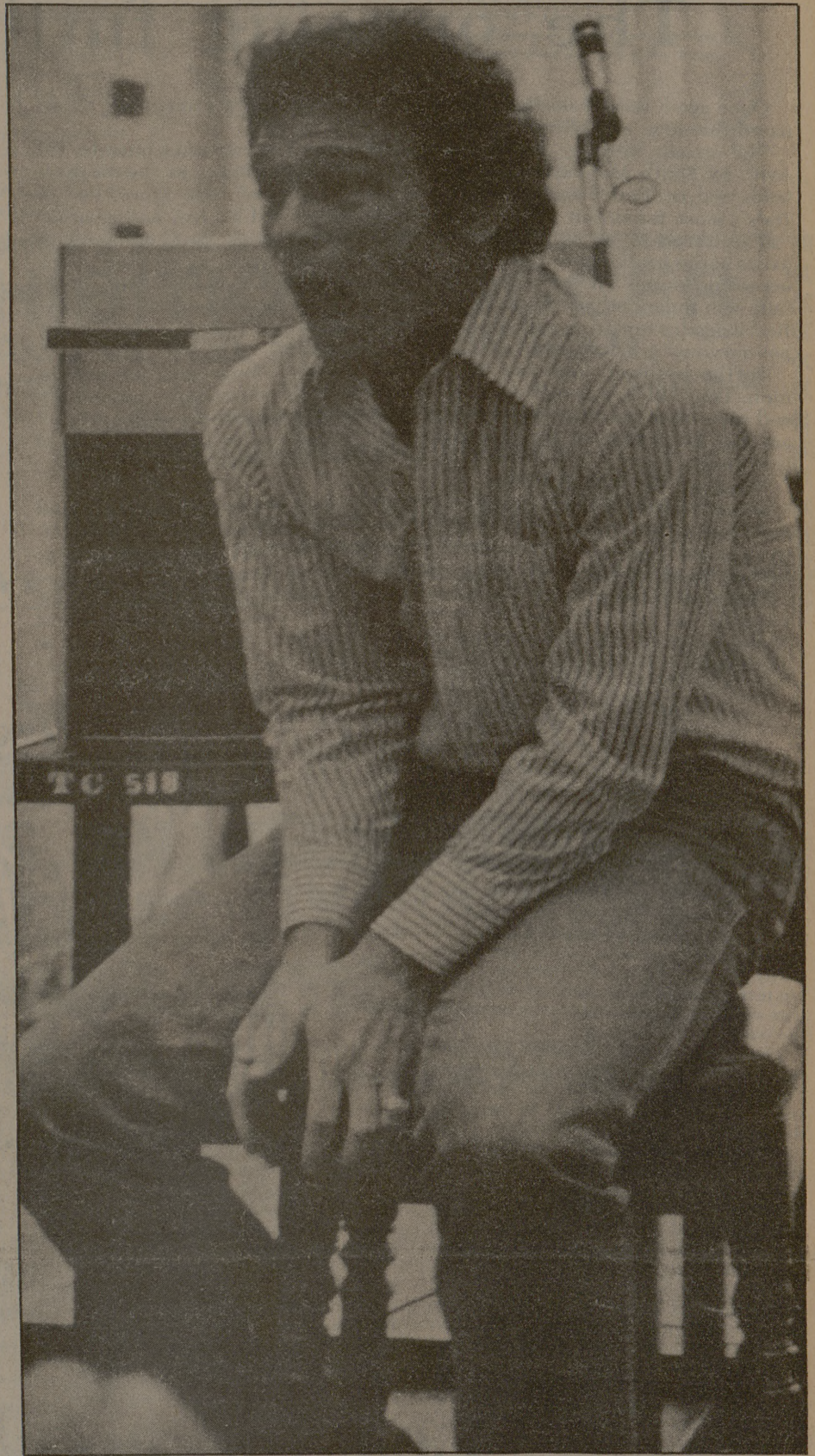
What if a customer receives a bill that reads \$1,000 instead of \$100, the correct amount?

"We can take care of that without any problem and the customer usually laughs it off," says Davie.

But it's those not-so-obvious errors that arouse the most surprise in a client distressed by the unexpected amount of his utility bill.

"If a customer has a question about his bill, we can go back and check the records that were turned in by the meter readers," says Davie. "We'll even send a man out to check the individual meter if we have to."

The final step for the disenchanted utility client in College Station is talking to Bardell. The city manager talks to individuals who are upset over the amount of their bill, have probably already been sent through four or five channels, and realize that Bardell is their last hope and that they have to be convincing.



Wild and Crazy Aggie

Kent Crank won two tickets to the upcoming Steve Martin performance for being the "most wild and crazy guy" in Town Hall's comedian contest held Thursday. Crank, a senior agricultural education major, demonstrated how a chicken lays eggs in Poultryville, U.S.A.

Battalion photo by Elizabeth Ghio

City Council discussion lively, emotional

Tenants question utility bills

By FLAVIA KRONE

Electricity and pets were the subjects dominating a lively and sometimes emotional discussion during the College Station City Council meeting Thursday night.

Residents of the Durango apartment complex in the 1600 block of Anderson questioned council members about high electric bills they say they received for the period from Dec. 12 to Jan. 19.

Walter Kahanek, 1607 Anderson, Apt. B, said all but two of the complex's 84 units were vacated during the Dec. 16 to Jan. 16 semester break. All tenants who vacated their apartments turned off their

electricity at the thermostat and half of the tenants cut their power at the circuit breaker, Kahanek said.

However, Kahanek says most of the tenants received higher than average electric bills, although they were absent from their apartments during most of the billing period and the electric power was shut off. Kahanek said the apartment meter readings correspond to city meter records, but in some cases city records indicate a meter change even though circuit breakers were turned off.

The councilmen were at a loss to explain the high bills. City Manager North Bardell

said, "The only explanation we can offer is that was the coldest period ever recorded in Brazos County history. Our power purchases were up 32 percent."

Councilman Gary Halter suggested that the apartment owner may have turned the power on to avoid pipe breakage during the cold weather.

But another tenant, Stan Caplan, 1613 Anderson Apt. B, said, "I've worked in air-conditioning for four years and I know that the strip-heater system used in the apartments can short out. Before I left I unplugged everything, including the hot-

water heater, refrigerator, clocks and appliances. Our bill for the period was \$19 more than our average monthly bill."

Bardell said the city had received similar complaints from residents of Sevilla Apartments, 401 Anderson, and the Southwest Village Apartments, 1101 Southwest Parkway. All of the apartment complexes in question have individually metered units.

The council said the city would continue to look into the matter.

In other action, Dr. and Mrs. Duane C. Kraemer, 1208 Austin Ave. and Mrs. Mickey Ray, 1206 Austin Ave., addressed the council concerning their pet dogs which they said were mistakenly destroyed by the city.

Normally, College Station strays are picked up by the police and kennel at the Anderson Ridge Veterinary Hospital, 1101 Anderson. A description of the animal is logged at the police station. If the animal is not claimed within 72 hours it is taken to the city dump and shot.

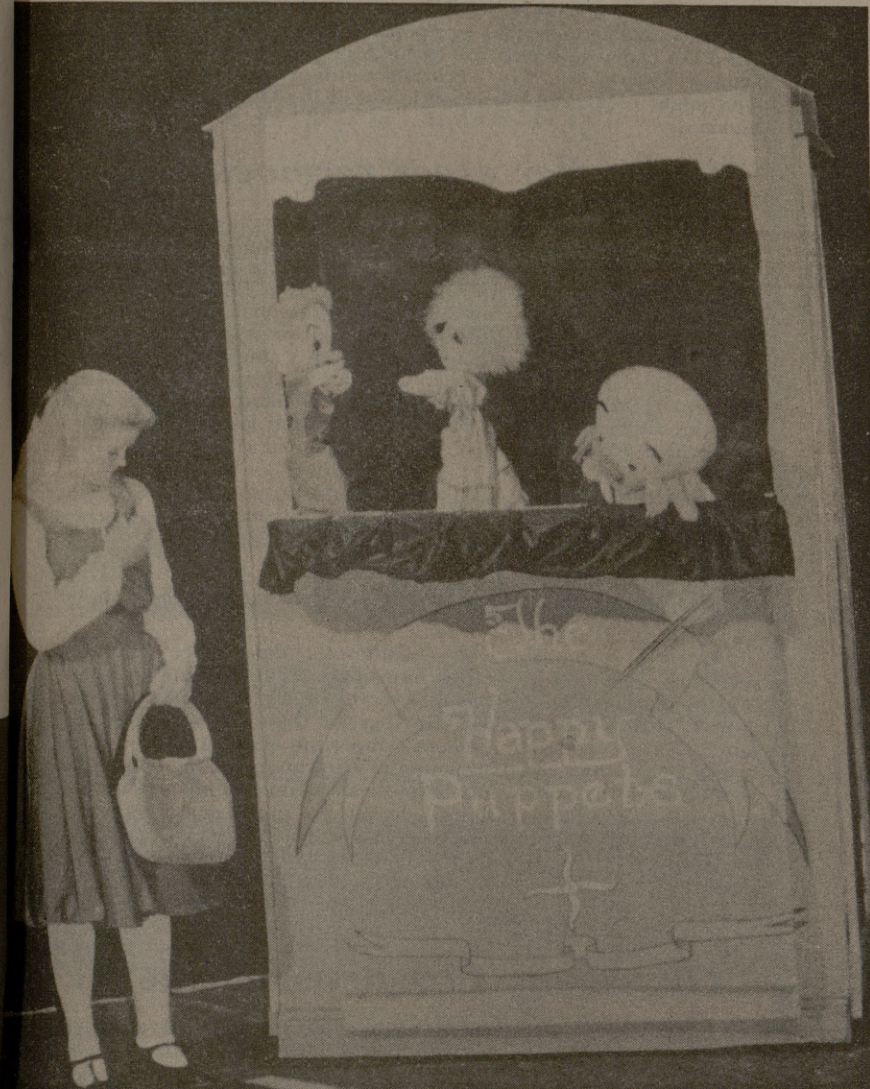
Owners of lost pets must inquire about their animals at the College Station Police Department. On the basis of descriptions in the stray animal log, police will say whether or not an animal has been picked up. In the past, the city refused to identify where an animal was being confined, prohibiting any visual identification by the owner.

Kraemer said he called the police repeatedly but was told that no animal had been picked up in his area, even though the police had logged a description matching that of his dog.

Mrs. Kraemer said, "I kept telling them that I knew they had picked up my dog and to please tell me where it was so I could identify it. They kept saying they weren't allowed to do that."

Mrs. Kraemer said she heard from the Humane Society that stray animals were confined at the Anderson Ridge Veterinary Hospital. At the hospital, Mrs.

(See Council, page 3)



Love makes the world go 'round

Paul (Michael Wilson) talks to his true love, Lili (Debbie Ellis) through his puppets Carrot Top, Marguerite and the walrus in the Aggie Players' performance of "Carnival." The show will run tonight and tomorrow in Rudder Forum. Please see review, page 6.

Battalion photo by Elizabeth Ghio

Health Agency drafts proposal to determine area concerns

By CHRIS CAIN

Board members of the Central Texas Health Systems Agency (CTHSA) Thursday decided to present a method of determining the area's major health concerns. The board of directors will vote on the system at their next meeting.

The National Health Planning and Resources Development Act of 1974 combined existing federal health planning programs into a nationwide system of local planning agencies, health systems agencies and state planning authorities. These agencies are governed by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW).

The 30 board members of CTHSA were selected to represent the area's population by ethnic group, income, sex and geographic distribution. Sixteen of the members are called "consumers." This means they receive health care services. The remaining 14 are called "providers" because they give medical care.

It is a private, non-profit corporation established in June 1976. As a citizen-based organization, CTHSA is required by law to enlist public participation in the development of its plans. Public meetings are held to gain this support and

identify the main local health concerns.

The agency is required to compile a health systems plan and an annual implementation plan. The goals of the health system plan are to have the highest health status and improve the quality of services offered, while keeping the cost down.

CTHSA staff members instructed the board of directors on the use of a health system ballot. The ballot will enable the agency to single out the major health concerns that can be acted on first.

Two types of ballots were discussed. On one of the proposed ballots, five statements on different health problems are listed. Each one is ranked in relation to one of the five statements.

For example, the health concern in question may be high infant mortality rates. One of the statements reads:

"The severity of this condition is:

- a) extent of disability
- b) duration
- c) life-threatening

Since mortality rates are life-threatening, it may be ranked a high priority item. The results are combined and the health concern considered a high priority may be acted upon by the agency.



What's up, Doc?

With Easter only a few days away, some Davis-Gary Hall residents are awaiting the arrival of the infamous Peter Cottontail. These two inflatable fellows were spotted four floors up in the window of senior biology major Philip Robinson. Battalion photo by Louis Hejtmancik