

Retail Merchants' Department

Burton Bunch, Manager
Scott C. White, Chairman

PROBLEMS:

Itinerant Peddlers
Mail-Order Competition
Opening and Closing Hours
Returned Merchandise
Promiscuous Subscriptions

LAUNCH RETAIL MERCHANTS PROGRAM

Meetings and conferences of latter part of 1919 have resulted in the working out of an effectual and far reaching program for 1920—especially taking into account the Minimum Wage Issue; the Buy At Home Movement; and establishments of business standards.

PROBLEMS:

Holiday Observance
Merchant's Discounts
Home Market Advertising
False Advertising
Employment

This department was created with the reorganization of the Chamber of Commerce in the Spring of 1919. A Committee of Management was named, with Scott White as chairman, and nine other men as members, to serve as a medium of intercourse between the retailers and the parent organization. Four members of the Board of Directors were named as ex-officio members of the Committee to represent the retailers on the Board.

Up until November 15, 1919, however, the Retail Merchants' Department conducted few activities, although it performed real service in bringing about discussion of, and in disseminating information concerning the so-called luxury tax and the Davis Profiteering bill.

Effective November 15, Burton Bunch was made manager of the department and meetings were called within a few days, to draft a program for the year. These meetings were held on November 19, Nov. 25th., Dec. 3rd., and a number of group meetings were held for initial discussion of the features of a program that was outlined at the meeting of November 19th. This program included the following:

- 1.—Mail Order Competition
- 2.—Itinerant Peddler competition.
- 3.—Advertising
- 4.—Home Markets.
- 5.—Return of Merchandise
- 6.—Approval orders
- 7.—Merchants' courtesy discounts
- 8.—Promiscuous soliciting of subscriptions and false advertising from retailers
- 9.—Minimum Wage Law for women
- 10.—Opening and closing hours
- 11.—Uniform observance of holidays

The Committee of Management.

The personnel of the Committee of Management was somewhat changed by the necessities of participation in a membership campaign which closed a week's activity September 17th. Some of the original members had for one reason and another been drawn into other work, so that the revised list of membership on which Mr. Bunch called for assistance in the first of his meetings contained the following names:

- Scott White, Chairman, Scott White Drug Co.
H. Coblenz, vice-chairman, The White House.
Chas. Schutz, The Guarantee Shoe Co.
Harry Swain, Men's Furnishings, 109 Texas Street.
R. Silberberg, Silberberg Bros., Jewelers.
C. A. Danielson, J. H. Nations Co., meats, etc.
C. S. Pickerell, Elite Confectionery Co.
F. J. Feldman, E. San Antonio Street, sporting goods.
J. C. Ballard, The Ballard Co.
Ross Bryan, Bryan Bros., Men's Furnishings.

The following members of the Board of Directors represented the Retail Merchants' Department on the Board up to the close of the fiscal year:

- A. Schwartz, The Popular D. G. Co.
Fred W. Norton, International Book Co.
T. H. Rogers, Rogers Furniture Co.
E. W. Kayser, First National Bank.

The membership of the department, greater in number possibly than any other single department, realized the necessity for a different application or remedial measures in El Paso.

Group Meetings Deemed Advisable.

The advisability of holding group meetings for discussions of the various problems presented, each group to take up the subjects from their own viewpoint, was discussed. The Committee of Management was instructed to meet at once and to draft a program to be followed by a general meeting set for December 3. This committee met on November 25th and set for discussion the subjects of closing hours and opening hours for the various lines of business; co-operation in observance of a uniform hour for the darkening of display windows, and the uniform observance of certain definite holidays. It was understood that each group of retailers would decide separately upon the opening and closing hours best suited for their own line. The committee arrived at the decision that detail matters of interest to particular groups be discussed fully by the groups interest, and that the Committee confine itself in future to discussion of general topics passed to it by the groups or by the general meetings. The group meetings were halted by the holidays.

A new group was added to the Retail Merchants' Department with the decision of the El Paso Soda Fountain and Confectioners' Association on December 2nd to affiliate with the Chamber of Commerce.

The Sugar Situation.

In co-operation with the Jobbers Department and with the Mexican Trade Relations Department, this department called a meeting of all retailers who were interested in sugar, in joint session with the jobbers on December 22, for a discussion of the sugar situation, which at this time appeared to be acute. This meeting developed the fact that there was on hand some stocks of sugar, and that a quantity was en route to El Paso from certain refineries so that partial relief was promised.

Subscriptions have been made by this department to a number of publications relating to the different phases of retailing. These magazines are kept on file in the office of the department and are used for their informational and inspirational value. Assistance has been had from the Secretaries of retail merchant's organizations in other cities, and from other Chambers of Commerce, and from the Secretary of the National Association of Retail Secretaries. This assistance has come in the form of reports, personal letters containing information as to special accomplishments, and proceedings of a national convention of retail secretaries. All this matter is on file.

Few 1920 Meetings.

The Retail Merchants' Department has held no important meetings since the first of the year, although some very definite accomplishments have been recorded. Due to the fact that the holiday season kept most members busy, decision was made late in December to hold no meetings until about the middle of January.

At that time effort was made to get together a quorum of the Committee of Management, to discuss certain important matters, particularly a plan to institute a campaign of education, by advertising a Buy-At-Home movement. Merchants generally were busy at inventories. At the suggestion of members of the Committee of Management, the schedule of meetings for January was ignored.

One exception was a January meeting of the Soda Fountain and Confectioners' Association, an affiliated organization, which was held on January 20th.

Soda Fountain and Confectioners Meetings.

Other meetings of this association were held on February 17 and February 24. At these meetings important decisions governing the size of glass containers for certain drinks, the profitable prices of all drinks dispensed, and quantities of ingredients were discussed. The use of a distinctive glass sign by members was authorized, and decision to assess a membership fee of \$5 a year was reached. It was understood that these dues were in no way to be considered Chamber of Commerce fees, but were to defray expenses outside the influence of the Chamber of Commerce program, such as advertising the desirability of patronizing shops displaying the special sign, and for other expenses. The Manager of this department was appointed to serve temporarily as Treasurer of the association.

This department rendered direct service to the Druggists' Group by transmitting to its membership certain information concerning the desire of a druggist in another city to purchase a drug business in El Paso, opening opportunity for sale to any who might desire to sell.

Profiteering.

As a means of putting before the public at large educational, logical and fair arguments disclaiming blame for prevailing high prices, this department got together information and ideas for use in preparing a resolution for the approval of the Retail Merchants' Department. This effort included also the accumulation of facts concerning the effect on business of certain federal taxes and other legislation, which were used as features in the body of the resolution, which was adopted March 3. Facts are being had from retail associations in other cities, and from the national organizations so that profit may be had from experience of others.

Buy-at-Home.

Following up the movement set under way at a meeting of the Adclub, to conduct a campaign teaching the meaning of the Buy-at-Home spirit, this department turned over to the newspapers the suggestion for the sale of a page each week in the two dailies, carrying the cards of merchants who were willing to support the movement. The text matter of each of these advertisements has been prepared by the manager of the department. The campaign opened Saturday, January 17 in the Herald, followed by a page in the Times, Sunday, January 18, and is to run for a period of three months. Reports that have reached this department indicate that the merchants and the public are pleased with the campaign.

The Minimum Wage Law.

Following a suggestion from the executive department, this department on Feb. 12th, sent out a letter explaining the stand of the Chamber of Commerce on the Minimum Wage Law. This letter was accompanied by a digest of the law, and a questionnaire in which information as to number of female and minor employees, and average of wages, was sought. This information to be used together with similar data obtained by other departments, in presenting accurate figures as to El Paso when steps shall be taken to urge the repeal of the law. The Industrial Welfare Commission was to have met February 14th, in Austin, to fix the minimum wage, as they were empowered by the original act to do, after holding hearings in various centers of the state. These hearings

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