

lugubrious enough; on the other hand, on the general question of management we do not appear to have got into quite such a tangle as some of the ardent people who have lately been carrying out railway nationalization in Europe. There is, for instance, the case of the Western Railway of France, a line whose inefficiencies have been the subject of alternate jest and indignation for years past. Two years ago it was taken over by the State; and things have gone from bad to worse. M. Theodor Reinach in the *Paris Figaro*, tells the story of a journey from Paris to Dinard, the fashionable watering place in Brittany, which reads like a history of practical jokes. There was a restaurant car, but no corridor carriages, so that the train was stopped at a wayside station to let passengers change. Before they were in again it started, leaving a number behind. In the car both waiters and food were lacking; there were long waits between stations and when the train was divided at Dol, the St. Malo portion was taken to Dinard, and the Dinard portion to St. Malo. At Dinard the hotel omnibuses and cabs had gone home in despair; it was nearly midnight and there were not even lanterns wherewith to get out the baggage. Such is railway management under State control in France at the present day; and the facts are hardly encouraging to the people who talk glibly of increased efficiency as a consequence of State management.

In far-off Austria there are similar troubles. There, the railways which have been taken over by the State, have heavy deficits every year, though when they were in private hands they paid big dividends—State railway deficits appear to be a phenomenon familiar the world over. As a result, in Austria an *enquête* is to be held shortly on the advisability of a total re-organisation of the State railways. Among the prominent men who were asked to take part in the *enquête* was Director General Kestranck, of the Prague Iron Industry Company, who wrote declining on the ground that the best evidence could be given by employees who had served both under private management and the Government and who are the best judges of where the difference in the management brings about fatal results. "Political influence," he continues, "must be removed a long way from the management of the railways. If lines are built because the votes of the district that ask for them are required, how can the interests of the entire body be respected? The offices of the high railway functionaries are filled with members of Parliament demanding favours all the year round. Then the question of nationalities plays a prominent part where appointments are in question. When an important post becomes vacant, or is newly created, the man who is best fitted to fill it is never appointed, but the Minister knows perfectly well that he must give one post to a German, another to a Czech, a third to a Pole and another to a Slovene, whether their abilities make them worthy of the position or not." That railways cannot be managed by Parliament is Director Kestranck's conclusive opinion.

So much for experiences of direct management of railways by the State. Nearer home, the question of the nationalisation of the Irish railways

has been made a topic of the day by the publication after four years' exhaustive enquiry of an elaborate report by the Vice-Regal Commission on Irish railways referred to in another column by our London correspondent. Irish railways have from the commencement of their history been in a very different position from those of Great Britain and the present commission is the last of a long series which have sought to find out how to secure an adequate transport service in so sparsely populated a country. The Irish transport system suffers from the many small and struggling companies which divide the traffic between them, and this absence of common management is the one point on which the commissioners arrive at an unanimous conclusion. They agree that there should be unification of the Irish railways with the object of securing special and cheap transit arrangements.

But the form in which unification should be made is the cause of grave difference of opinion among the commissioners. The majority of four recommend the acquisition and administration of the railways by an Irish elected authority, consisting of four Government nominees and 16 elected members, the State to guarantee the interest on the necessary capital, which is to be charged on the net revenue of the lines, but any deficit to be made up by a special rate. The minority of three commissioners, on the other hand, are opposed to any greater measure of State control than is involved in the encouragement of voluntary amalgamation among the existing companies. The differences between English and Irish companies are, in their opinion, due to natural differences in the conditions of the two countries, and the chief hope of improvement is to be found in the steady growth and progress of agriculture and commerce. They recommend that the much-needed process of concentration should be effected in the first instance by voluntary agreement among the companies themselves, and that the process should be facilitated by suitable legislation and encouraged in certain cases by financial assistance. Failing agreement within three years, railway companies should be compelled to amalgamate within four years on terms to be fixed by arbitration.

Thus both reports recommend interference by the State to a much greater extent than hitherto, and both are prepared to draw on the State revenue, if need be, to rescue the railways from a situation which is admitted to be highly unsatisfactory. The matter is well summed up by the London Economist. "Until," writes that journal, "we have had more experience of the policy of amalgamation in Great Britain, we should hesitate to make it compulsory in Ireland on the terms proposed by the minority. Nor must it be forgotten that the proposals of the majority involve the creation of a new army of State employees, who would beset the local candidates with clamorous appeals for higher wages and shorter hours." And State control *per se*, as the evidence shows, is no guarantee of efficiency.

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