

PUBLIC OWNERSHIP OF RAILROADS

A Study of the Results of the Policy of Government Ownership of the Transportation Systems in Europe

For the Public By Erik Oberg. (Conclusion of Article.)

IV. Passenger Fares and Service of Leading Publicly Owned Systems—I. Germany.

We have seen in the preceding part of our inquiry, that publicly owned railroads have proved to be sound undertakings financially, and that, had they been built by actually paid in stock capital, thus comparing them with a sound private enterprise, there is not a single publicly owned system in Europe or Australia which would have failed financially. This is more than can be said of many a privately built and managed road.

In the present article we will examine the service rendered by publicly owned railroads, and the charges exacted for service. This is the final test of the soundness of government operation of railways. If by government operation it has proved possible to earn a high percentage of net profits, at the same time as rates have been low, and having a tendency of constantly becoming lower, then we may well conclude that government operation is in all respects equally efficient with private management in the case of railroads; and, inasmuch as the general public and not private manipulators, is benefited by the success of the system, government operation would be preferred, if for nothing else, for reasons of pure expediency.

The trains on the German railroads carry three, and in some cases four classes of passengers. In a general way it may be said that the first and second class correspond to our Pullman and chair cars; third class to our coaches, and that there is no corresponding accommodation to the fourth class in this country. In regard to comfort there is but a slight difference between first and second class. Both compare, when the differences in the habits and requirements of the people are considered, well with the accommodations offered by Pullman cars on American railroads. That these two classes are decidedly superior to the accommodation offered by our regular coaches should be specially noted; one proof of this is that first and second class cars in Germany of about the same size as our regular passenger cars, seat only about half the number of passengers that can be seated in our coaches, so that, as to space, a second class passenger is given nearly double the space accorded to regular travellers on our roads. First class cars, in fact, are even more spacious than that, per passenger.

The third class, again, is not as comfortable as our coaches, comparing more nearly with the comfort accorded passengers on some of the elevated railroads in New York, (strap hanging, however, excluded). Still the third class cars are always clean, hygienic, and kept in excellent condition.

Fares vary, of course, according to classes, and also according to kind of train. An extra charge is made for travel with through express trains. While the fares have always been low in Germany as compared with either the United States or Great Britain.

In comparing the regular mileage rate charged on German railroads, with the rates on American railroads, the high class rate should not be compared with American rates. This rate is the price of exclusiveness and distinction, and not of accommodation merely. The second class rates are the ones that should equitably be

compared with the charge required for the best American service. The second class passengers, in general, represent the same class as travels in Pullman cars in America, and the class of travellers who use the third class in Germany correspond to those who use the ordinary coaches in this country. This statement is amplified by statistics showing that in 1901, of all the passengers on the German State railroads, 0.37 per cent only travelled first class; 8.95 per cent, second class; and 89.01 per cent, third and fourth class; 1.67 per cent. were military persons.

To compare the second or first class rate on German railroads with our regular so-called "first-class" ticket rate is absolutely erroneous, and is done either out of ignorance or for reasons of wilful deception. The only comparison possible is to compare the coaches on the American roads with the third class cars in Europe, because both of these accommodations serve the bulk of the traffic, and the space accommodations per passenger is also equal in these two kinds of cars, although as mentioned before, the coaches here are superior in comfort, not on account of giving any more space, but because of their upholstering.

Comparing with English roads, which are all private, and which cannot even claim higher rate of wages paid as an excuse for high passenger fares, we find that the lowest German rates are less than one-half the lowest regular English rate, and that the average German rate is but slightly more than one-half of the English average rate.

An indication of the high standard of accommodation offered is also given by mentioning the sleeping cars on the German state railways. These are all divided in actual state-rooms, and the modern cars have only two berths in each state-room, there being ten state-rooms in each car. These cars are a trifle longer than the regular Pullman sleepers, so that the space per passenger is greater than here. In each state-room there is a washstand, mirror, etc., giving a far superior accommodation to the regular Pullman sleepers in this country.

The speed of the trains on German railways is, of course, also a consideration in regard to good service.

Between Berlin and Halle there are seven express trains a day, running at an average speed of over fifty miles per hour, one of them running at an average speed of close to 55 miles an hour. Between Berlin and Hamburg there are five trains a day running at an average speed of between 51 and 53.5 miles an hour. On all other leading German lines there is at least one, and often more, trains daily, running at an average speed of 50 miles an hour.

Turning now to the United States we find that the average speed of the Empire State Express, so much spoken of, is not more than 54.5 miles an hour, and that, with the exception of the one fast Chicago express, the 18-hour train, all other trains run at an average speed of less than 50 miles an hour on the New York Central railroad. On the New York, New Haven and Hartford railroad, which may be taken as an average of