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U.S. RAILROAD SITUATION

SOME surprise was caused by the recent action of the United States Railroad Administration in handing back to the owners the entire control of approximately 2,000 United States railroads. These were, of course, short-line roads, electric feeders and plant facility lines. There remain in the hands of the railroad administration about 200 short-line railroads. It is obvious, therefore, that it is the intention of the government to retain control of the great roads which are essential to the industries of the United States, and to relinquish those roads which serve particular industries or outlying communities. Many of the returned roads were built merely to serve single industrial plants such as lumber concerns, coal mines, etc. About 200 are electric feeders to the main-line roads and less than 400 are short-line railroads doing the general business of a common carrier between two or more localities.

This action of the railroad administration has no doubt been influenced by the results of the first year's operation of the roads by the government. It was not necessary to operate these 2,000 short roads in order to determine whether they were essential to the industries of the country. It was clearly obvious in the first place that this was not the case. Had the government operation of the roads been successful in the economic sense, there is no doubt that these lines would have been retained, together with the longer lines. Their return, therefore, is a frank admission that the government cannot operate the lines with the same efficiency as the owners themselves. Whether the lines are operated by the owners or by the government, the former are going to

do all in their power to make them safe and profitable investments. The work of the government cannot assist them in this direction and is, therefore, unnecessary.

In retaining the large lines, however, the government maintains with consistency its original policy. These are the ones upon which every industry depends to a greater or smaller extent. It is, therefore, for political, not for economic motives, that these are operated by the government. In fact, it is generally admitted by all who examine the results, that the expenses of operation have increased more rapidly than would have been the case under private control. Not only was a general increase in rates of 15 per cent. insufficient to meet this increase, but also the government found itself with a substantial deficit to meet. After many years of consistent restrictions of rates and consequent depreciation in the value of railroad securities, the United States government found itself almost immediately after assuming the business of railroading, required to make a much larger increase in rates than had been even considered while the railroads were in private hands.

ADOPTION OF THE METRIC SYSTEM OPPOSED IN GREAT BRITAIN

THE final report to the British Parliament of the Committee on Commercial and Industrial Policy after the War contains a chapter relating to weights and measures. The 19 members of the committee were unanimous in opposing the compulsory adoption of the metric system. Their conclusions are as follow:

"Having given very full consideration to the subject, we are unable to recommend the compulsory adoption of the metric system in this country. In our opinion, it is absolutely certain that the anticipated uniformity could not be obtained for a very long period, if ever.

"There is, further, the serious objection that if we induced the above mentioned countries to change over to the metric system, we should be surrendering to Germany the advantage which our manufacturers now enjoy over hers, both in their markets and our own.

"We are informed that even in France, which has made the metric system nominally compulsory for more than half a century, the 'pouce' (or inch) is used in textile manufacture and numerous local measures still survive.

"In referring to these considerations, we have to point out that there is no unanimity even as to the theoretical merits of the metric system as compared with our own. The practical argument that its adoption is desirable in order to secure uniformity in the markets of the world has been shown to be unfounded. We are not satisfied by any evidence which has been brought before us that trade has actually been lost to this country owing to the fact that the use of the metric system is not compulsory.

"But to attempt to make the use of the system universal and obligatory in this country would cause loss and confusion at a particularly inopportune moment, for the sake of distant and doubtful advantages. We are convinced that, so far from assisting in the re-establishment of British trade after the war, such a measure would seriously hamper it.

"As regards the educational advantages claimed for the change, we have been referred to a statement quoted by the Select Committee of 1895 that no less than one year's school time would be saved if the metric system were taught in the place of that now in use. The information which we have received does not support that