

All considered, the political difficulties, while of a more serious nature than any of the other conditions we have investigated, are by no means insurmountable. We can model our railroad departments from Europe; there is no reason why we should be too proud to learn from our sister nations when in this particular case they can teach us a valuable lesson. We can surely do as well as they have done. How inconsistent if we, who boast of being the foremost nation in the world, and the best business men, should not consider ourselves capable of handling our railway system the same as does Germany.

The American people have not yet failed in anything they earnestly undertook. Nor will they fail when they once realize their duty and their rights in regard to the public highways of their country.

That public ownership of railroads is a political issue we may consider as a conclusive fact; not necessarily an active political issue, but one which is slowly but surely working its way from its passive into its active state. The general dissatisfaction with the manner in which the railroads have discharged their duties has been so pronounced that even from conservative quarters we have utterances to the effect that whatever the faults of public ownership, it would be an improvement on past and present conditions.

In our present inquiry we have therefore endeavored to answer the question whether public ownership of railroads has been successful elsewhere. We have made but few attempts to consider the outcome of a public ownership policy in the United States. If this policy has proved successful, and in some cases eminently successful, elsewhere, why should we doubt its success here? Are we not equally capable of doing what other nations have done?

All we have therefore sought has been the facts. And we have found, by quoting authentic statistical figures, that government ownership of railroads in foreign countries has not proved to be a financial failure. We have seen that the majority of state railways have given returns of from 3.5 to 7 per cent on the capital expended for construction and equipment of the roads. We have found that government railroads are not recent experiments, and that the tendency, after seventy, sixty or fifty years of application of the public ownership policy in the respective countries, is toward more, rather than less, state railroads. We have seen that in the country where the public railways have in all respects reached the highest development, but 8 per cent of all the railroads are now in private hands, and that this percentage is constantly growing less. We have found that the bulk of the world's railways, those of our own country excepted, are operated as government railways; that this has made it possible to render service cheaply, and with financial success. As examples of this we have found that on the largest state railway system in the world the average passenger fare is less than a cent a mile; that in another country a thousand-mile journey can be undertaken at an expense of less than seven dollars; and that at an expense of slightly more than ten dollars the same journey may be made with accommodations far superior to those offered by the coaches in America. We have found that the accommodations offered by existing state railways, particularly in Northern Europe, are of a kind comparable to any, and that the service is rapid and punctual.

We have seen further that freight rates, contrary to current opinion, based on misleading figures, offering no true comparison, are not higher on government railroads, except in very special instances, than on the private railroads in the United States, and that, comparing European state railway systems with European private systems, the public railways invariably furnish cheaper service. And last, but not least, we have found that the safety of travel is greater, and in countries with highly developed state railway systems, far greater, than in our

own country. We may add, to complete our statement, that discriminations in rates are unknown, and that the public railway administrations follow the progress in their respective fields fully as closely as do our private managements. Many of the developments and improvements in the railway field have been originated and first adopted by governmental railway systems in Europe.

In short, we have found from our investigation that the claim referred to in the introduction of this series, that "existing government railroads are not managed with either the efficiency or economy of privately managed roads, and the rates charged are not as low, and therefore not as beneficial to the public," is absolutely false in regard to most of existing state railways; and in regard to the rest of them it contains only a half truth.

The facts quoted, however, not only permit us to reject the statement made by the present Republican candidate for the Presidency, as having been uttered either out of ignorance of real conditions, or in subservience to "vested interests"; they also permit those of us who believe in government ownership of public property to claim that government ownership of railroads has proved highly successful everywhere where it has been fairly tried. This, we claim, is because public ownership of public highways is the only reasonable and logical condition of ownership—in a word, because it is the only condition of ownership which fills the demands of true, genuine democracy, in the deep and real sense of this word.

Let me here repeat, that it should be understood that when we attack private ownership of railroads we attack a condition; we do not attack personalities. If private ownership is a wrong condition, if it has been fruitful of corruption and public degeneration, it is not the past and present owners or managers who are the only ones responsible. We, the people of the United States, who permit this condition to continue are responsible. Let us not as cowards blame others for what in the last instance is due to our own inactivity, apathy, and lack of appreciation of the ideals of a true republic. There are railway officials in the United States who, as men, are of the highest type. It has been said before, and it may well be repeated, that there are in this country able railroad men who, if serving the interests of the whole people, rather than the interests of a private monopoly, would raise the railway system of this country to the foremost place in the world. There are men in the service of the railroads, occupying the seats of directors, who realize the inequity and the attendant evils of private ownership. There are others, in managing positions, who denounce as strongly as anyone the depravity of their stock-gambling superiors. But these men will not come to their own until our railway system is operated for public benefit rather than for private gain. Let it therefore be fully understood that it is the present inequitable system of monopoly we denounce, not the men who are the victims of our institutions.

The railway system of America has an opportunity ahead of it not equaled anywhere in the world, but only the ignorant boaster of his country would claim that we have as yet reached the goal. It is true that America has placed itself foremost in the world in many respects, due to industry, skill, persistence, and energy; and our practical railroad men have carried out a wonderful work. They have proved themselves equal to any occasion where their ability has been permitted to freely exercise itself. Let the fullest opportunity be given to these practical railway men—not to exploit the public for private gain, as many of them have been compelled to do against their will in the past, but to bring the railroads of America up to the highest standard attainable.

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