

THE PUBLIC OWNERSHIP OF RAILROADS.

For The Public.

VIII.

Safety of Travel.

The comparative safety of German government railroads should not be lost sight of. If we compare the figures for passengers killed in collisions and derailments in the United States and Germany, it seems beyond explanation why we in this country subject ourselves to such miserable management (for, finally it does come back to the management) and conditions on our railroads as to endanger our lives whenever we enter a railroad train.

While at the present time the German State railways carry 950 million passengers a year, compared with less than 750 millions carried by the railroads in the United States, a comparison on this ground is not fair, in as much as the average journey in Germany is only about one-half as long as the average journey in the United States. The comparison should therefore not be based on the total number of passengers, but upon passenger miles. If we do that, we are more than fair to the railroads of this country, because, inasmuch as the traffic is far heavier on the German roads than the average traffic here, the liability to accident for the same number of passenger miles should be greater there. The carrying of 950 million passengers over 33,000 miles of road means a very much denser traffic than the carrying of 750 million passengers over 210,000 miles of road. Furthermore, it must be admitted that the risks of accident are at least proportional to the density of traffic, or, perhaps, even increase as the square of the density; we, therefore, on two equally well managed roads would expect to find the greater number of accidents happen on the roads with the denser traffic, or the one carrying the greatest number of passengers per mile of track.

TABLE XVI.

Comparison Between Number of Persons Killed and Injured for 1,000 Million Passenger-Miles on American and German Railways.

	United States.	Germany.
Number of passengers killed in collisions and derallments	14.3	2.2
Total number of passengers killed.....	22.5	9.1
Number of employes killed in collisions and derallments	24.4	1.2
Total number of employes killed.....	141.2	42.6
Number of passengers injured in collisions and derallments	254.3	35.8
Total number of passengers injured.....	439.2	45.3
Number of employes injured in collisions and derallments	199.0	14.8
Total number of employes injured.....	2,808.0	111.5
Total number of people killed.....	407.7	91.4
Total number of people injured.....	3,614.0	184.2

For this reason a comparison of passengers

killed and injured per a certain number of passenger miles is more than fair to our American railroads. If we make such a comparison we will find that while in Germany only one passenger is killed in collisions and derailments for 1,000 million passenger miles (average for ten years), in the United States 14 passengers are killed in collisions and derailments for the same number of passenger miles. The number of the injured under the same conditions are in the proportion of *one to thirteen*. The total number of persons killed on the German railroads compared with the total number killed in this country is in the proportion of *one to four* for equal number of passenger miles. The total number of injured is in the proportion of *one to fourteen* for the same number of passenger miles. This comparison is between the German average for ten years, and the conditions on American-railroads for the year ending June 30, 1905. If we, however, compare with the year 1900-1901 in Germany, which was particularly one of great accidents, and one where the German average was greatly exceeded, we still find that for each passenger killed there, for a certain number of passenger miles, between six and seven were killed here in collisions and derailments. The proportion of those injured was *one to seven* under the same conditions. A detailed statement is given in Table XVI, where a comparison based on 1,000 million passenger miles has been computed. It cannot be argued that the results there put forth are explainable for this country on account of higher speed or heavier traffic. The speed on all the German main lines equals or exceeds the ordinary speed of the trains of our railway lines, and as for traffic, few American railroads have as heavy a passenger traffic as the thickly populated German Empire offers its railroads. In reference to Table XVI it may be said that although the accidents were heavy in the United States in the year taken as an example (1905), the comparison is still more than fair to our railroads, as the year selected for Germany shows that the number of passengers killed and injured in that year in collisions and derailments was *more than three times the average number for the preceding ten years*; the number of passengers injured under the same conditions was nearly three times as great; and the number of accidents in general in that year was higher than the average for the German roads. Hence, a perfectly fair comparison for American roads is offered in Table XVI. It must, of course, be admitted that it is very difficult to determine a basis for comparison of the fatalities to employes on account of the fact that in such a comparison the passenger as well as the freight service enters. Supposing that we compared the accidents to employes on the basis of the ton-mileage in Germany being about one-ninth the ton-mile-

age in the United States in the years compared. We would still have the proportion of employes killed in train accidents in Germany and the United States for the same number of ton-miles as about 1 to 6.3, and the proportion of those injured as 1 to 4.5.

This comparison is a deplorable one to make. "What is the use of our boasted development, if we cannot attain it except at such a cost of human life? Why is it that American railroads prove so much more unsafe to their patrons, as well as to the employes of the road?" asks one of our railway journals. And the same journal proceeds:

We do not believe that it is because American railway employes are less capable, or naturally more reckless. It seems more plausible that the explanation is rather to be found in the lack of true system in our train movements, due, perhaps, in the last instance to the financial influence which governs our transportation system, creating, as it does, a spirit of irresponsibility. Whether the fact that German railroads are public property, run in the same manner as our government runs the postal service (with a great deal less political pull, to be sure), has anything to do with the greater safety of German railroads is difficult to assert, although it seems likely that this must be one of the favorable influences. At any rate, it is safe to say that private ownership, when accompanied by the past and present irresponsibility of railway managers, has proved fatal to the safety of passengers in the United States, and we earnestly hope that conditions will turn for the better, now that public opinion is aroused more than ever, and proper safeguarding is demanded for the life and limb of both passengers and employes. No other railway reform is more urgently needed. One important step was taken when the hours of duty of railway employes were shortened, but it is difficult by legislative measures to cure evils of this kind. What we need most of all is an aroused public opinion, and that somebody be held responsible in each case for this horrible killing and maiming.

The figures previously stated should be considered if we are in doubt about the efficiency of governmental as compared with private management. Let us study the painstaking efforts of government-owned railroads in Europe, particularly in Germany and the Scandinavian countries, for the safety of the public. Let us wake up out of the sleep through which we have become so used to having hundreds of people killed yearly by railway "accidents," that we have commenced to look upon this matter as the natural accompaniment of railroads. Let us realize that the necessity for railway accidents would be less imperative if the lives of our citizens were valued more than dividends on watered stock, arrogance in high office, and an all powerful monopoly, which, instead of being governed, has tried to govern the country, and, in fact, has succeeded in governing many individual States.

The German railway authorities make every effort to make life safe on the railways, for passengers as well as for employes. Thorough investi-

gations are made of every wreck, little or big, to find out the causes, and prevent their re-occurrence. Not infrequently someone is held responsible and punished for their occurrence. Exhaustive testimony is taken with the thoroughness of a criminal trial, the idea of the State railway managers being that the detailed history of railroad accidents affords the best basis for taking precautionary measures for their avoidance in the future.

A German railway official, having traveled in the United States, in a well put statement charged many of our accidents to lack of punctuality and a general lack of systematic working of American railroads. Our train dispatching system, with a single responsible dispatcher for a large portion of a system, he considered out of date; and he stated his belief that our railway system now, with introduction of mechanical signaling, etc., could make use of the more modern German system of running trains. He also found that at the stations the whole responsibility of the train movements was not placed in a single individual, as in Germany, and that this lack of systematic working also was a prolific cause of accidents.

There are, however, some other important causes for railway accidents in this country which this German observer either did not realize or else did not call attention to. Among these may be mentioned the overworking of employes; the existence of train rules which cannot well be lived up to, and which employes are not expected to live up to; the attempt to carry on a double track business on a single track road; general lack of initiative and fear of new departures; and in particular, too much adherence to that provincial American trait which prevents learning lessons from the outside, and profiting by the progress elsewhere.

The safety of other State railway systems, besides the German, is not less noteworthy. The Swedish State railroads at present carry more than 16,000,000 passengers a year. The total number of passengers killed by accidents not caused by their own carelessness, has been eight for a period of forty-seven years. The number of passengers injured during the same period, the injuries not being due to personal carelessness, has been sixteen.

On the Danish State railways only one passenger is either killed or injured for each 3,500,000 passengers. In the United States one person, in 1905, was either killed or injured for each 70,000 passengers.

A study of the safety of travel on the European State railways indicates plainly the advantages of railways managed by the public rather than by private monopoly, except in the case of Great Britain, where railroad travel, on the average, is as safe as anywhere else. Thus in 1890 the safety

of travel was the highest in Sweden and Denmark, where no passenger was killed in railway accidents; and then come in succession Great Britain, Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Austria-Hungary, Belgium, France, Italy, Russia, Spain and the United States. It is remarkably instructive to notice how those countries which have fostered private monopolies and tried to control them, like France and Italy, and those which have fostered them, and left them alone, like Spain and the United States, come at the very last in the above list. In these countries life is cheapest and can be most readily sacrificed to the god of gold. The position of Russia in this comparison is without significance from the point of view of government or private ownership, as in that country conditions in general are so abnormal as to permit of no comparison that would be conclusive, with other countries.

While in the particular year on which the above comparison is based, Great Britain takes precedence over Germany in regards to safety of travel, this is by no means always the rule. During a number of years during the last decade the fatalities on the German roads were proportionately smaller than on the British. Thus in 1899 the number of passengers killed on German railways for each million passengers carried was only 0.08, while this figure was 0.14 for Great Britain. The number of those injured was 0.39 for Germany and 1.94 for Great Britain.

In face of the figures quoted, and the conditions referred to, which everyone who takes the least interest in our railway problem may easily verify for himself, how can anyone conversant with the facts have the audacity to claim that public railway systems have been failures? Are our public men, members of our administration, who make such utterances, ignorant of the results attained by the State railway systems in Northern Europe? Have they accepted the statements of our interest-subservient press without further investigation? And if they have, how is it that we call such men statesmen?

ERIK OBERG.

BOOKS

A FUNDAMENTAL ELECTORAL REFORM.

Proportional Representation. Second Edition. By John R. Commons. Published by the Macmillan Co., New York, 1907. Price \$1.25 net.

The recent triumph of proportional representation in Oregon makes doubly welcome this second edition of a book which ever since its publication in 1896 has been the American authority on its subject.

The first edition contained a convincing arraignment

of the present voting system, followed by an exhaustive exposition of proportional representation and a sketch of the history and progress of this reform, with its possibilities for good in city, State and nation. There are now added several most valuable appendices dealing chiefly with the initiative and referendum, recognizing their importance, and yet maintaining that proportional representation is the most fundamental and positive of electoral reforms. "The referendum and the initiative," says Professor Commons, "like civil service reform, are negative. . . . They deal with the effects of boss politics and not its causes. They are necessary as a beginning. Like all improvements, whether in mechanics or politics, the first inventions are directed to check evils, not to readjust causes. The last reform espoused is that which goes to the roots. This is the place of proportional representation." "Proportional representation, from the fact that it makes the elective officers responsible directly to the people who elect them, restores the essential principle of representative government. Only in this way is irresponsible bossism cut down at the roots."

And what is this way? Perhaps the clearest and briefest statement is found in the Principles of the Proportional Representation League, of which Professor Commons is a vice president. Proportional representation is defined there as "The Reform of Legislative Assemblies, by abandoning the present system of electing single representatives on a majority or plurality vote in limited territorial districts, and by substituting the following provisions: (1) That all representatives be elected 'at large,' on a general ticket, either without district divisions or in districts as large as practicable. (2) That the election be in such form that the several parties or political groups shall secure representation in proportion to the respective number of votes cast by each."

The technique of the system in its various adaptations is hard to understand. The reform, then, is slower to gain converts. But it is on that account, no less basic and no less practical; for the balloting itself is simple and the principles are just.

ANGELINE LOESCH.

PERIODICALS

A parallel column comparison of the Democratic and Republican platforms is a picturesque feature of Mr. Bryan's Commoner of July 9. The Commoner, like The Public, will be sent from now to election day for twenty-five cents. (Lincoln, Neb.)

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More and more the questions which relate to the perpetuation of the race receive earnest, reverent and frank discussion. An example of this is found