

Throat Coughs

STATION AGAINST THE RAILROADS

An Address by Col. H. G. ...
General Manager Union
Switch and Signal Co.

stand face to face with a situation our national life of great importance to us as individuals, to our nation and to the race. The situation which I have in mind is created by the attitude of the American people toward the railroads. Great individual fortunes, corporations, trusts and, any devices by which a few men control large amounts of property have become objects of envy and of active hostility to the part of our fellow citizens. The resentment of the mass of the American people go so far as to regard great property values, to wish those who have been so successful as to make a little money to invest in the securities of the enterprises? They have the process without knowing they are doing. Will they go to it?

is the most solemn question has confronted this nation in the civil war. If we stand and allow the answer to the question to be determined by that class of politicians and editors who sit on the top of the wave of popular feeling and drift with it, the hope of being landed high and on some sunny slope of personal glory; if, I say, we allow the answer to this solemn question to be determined by that selfish and irresponsible class, we deserve the fate that will no doubt overtake

argest of Social Phenomena. The attitude of the people of the United States toward the railroads is one of the most social phenomena within observation or reading. Consider a moment what the railroads have done in the history of this nation. The building of the United States was the most colossal real enterprise the world ever saw dreamed of. Nothing like it ever happen again; nothing approaching it. It would be impossible to estimate the value of the part played by the railroads in this real operation which we call the building of the nation. It would be impossible to overstate it. It is pride and with amazement I think of the enterprise, the courage, the genius of the men who risked life and fortune in pushing roads over the uninhabited lands, the thinly peopled areas of our country in the second and third century of the century just closed. These were the heroic days when men had dreams and saw visions. These were the glorious days of the nation. States and cities and towns stood and beckoned to the railroad builders, and they gave us a notion also of the really very small returns which railroad properties make to their owners.

Light Burden of Transportation Tax.
The prosperity and the happiness of every man, woman and child in the civilized world depends more or less on the prompt, cheap and regular movement of freight over the railroads of the United States. Here in the United States the prompt, cheap and regular movement of freight is, excepting the crops, the most important element in our daily happiness and in our continued prosperity. The appreciation of this fact is one important element in the intense popular feeling against the railroads.

But people do not know how light is the burden of the transportation tax. They do not know that we have the cheapest freight rates in the world and the best freight service. They do not know that the free play of commercial forces uncontrolled by governments has given us a flexibility and an adaptation of rates and service such as no other country has seen. They do not stop to think that an 8-cent loaf of bread has paid one-third of a cent for transportation from the wheat fields of Dakota to the freight station in New York; that is, one twenty-fourth of its cost to the consumer is transportation tax. They do not stop to think that

in the relations of the railways to the traders and the manufacturers of the nation. It is not strange that certain somewhat crude notions should have been established as to the correct relations of railroads to society.

Result of Public Control.

The notion has now become very prevalent that the railroads are not to be treated as private properties, but as public institutions, at least at quasi-public institutions. A great number of our fellow citizens, including therein many of the most intelligent railroad officers, now believe that railroad affairs should be subjected to government control. I should say that a majority of our fellow citizens believe this. The question of difference is simply as to the degree of control that the states or the federal government are permitted to exercise. Personally, although I am a Republican in politics, in political economy I am a Democrat of the old school, and I have a thorough-going and fundamental belief in the doctrine that the government is best which governs least. I contemplate with dread an enlargement of the functions of government, and particularly the invasion of the field of railroad control by the officers of the state and federal government.

But I recognize that control of the railroads by the various governments within our country is bound to be tried on a very considerable scale. I still believe that it will fail, except in some broad and simple way; but I am quite sure that we shall go through a good many years of experiment with railroad control. This theory of the control of railroads is only one manifestation of the wave of socialism which is sweeping over the country and which has one of its principal fountains in the White House. It is the oncoming of that great wave which alarms me for the future of our country and which has such special menace for those who are responsible for the prosperity of the railroads.

I have spoken of the attitude of our people toward the railroads as a strange phenomena. This is true when you think of the part which the railroads have had in building the country, and when you think further of the part that the railroad play in our daily life. Outside of agriculture, railroading is the most important industry in the country. It employs more men than any other industry except agriculture. It pays out about \$850,000,000 a year in wages, being 60 per cent of the total operating expenses. It pays in dividends \$238,000,000.

The wages and taxes paid by the railroads amount to nearly four times as much as the dividends paid on railroad stock; in fact, the dividend payments amount to only about 3.6 per cent on the stock; 10 years ago the dividends paid amounted to but 1.7 per cent. A little more than 37 per cent of all the railroad stock of the country pays no dividends. Ten years ago about 70 per cent of the railroad stock of the country paid no dividends. These few figures give a notion of what the prosperity of the railroads means to the working people and to the manufacturers and traders of the country, and they give us a notion also of the really very small returns which railroad properties make to their owners.

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a mechanic, working one day, earns enough to pay for the transportation from Chicago to Liverpool of his food for one year. Cheap transportation had opened up to the poor man the markets of the world from which to draw his food and clothes, and had given to him the markets of the world in which to sell his labor.

"Between the Devil and the Deep Sea."

If the railroads are going to continue to do their part in the further development of our country and in the further progress toward liberty, happiness and prosperity of all the people of the earth, it is obvious that they must not be hampered or crippled. This principle applies to their administration and to their financial credit. That their administration may be the most efficient, the freest play must be given to the operation of the great elements of ambition, energy and enterprise; and, that they may be able to finance their future requirements, their credit must be sustained.

I shall not stop here to consider the debated and debatable question as to who is the most powerful in destroying the credits of the railroads—the financier who represents what the President calls predatory wealth, or the President himself as representing the wrath of the people. I merely point out that at this moment the railroads are between the devil and the deep sea; and further, that anything which cripples the railroads is a calamity of the first magnitude for the nation.

It is a national misfortune that the railroads are so generally and systematically misrepresented in the public press. Fair discussion, discussion in the spirit of justice and truth, is almost never seen in the daily newspaper treatment of railroad matters, whether it be of accidents, of freight rates, of passenger rates, or whatever may be the subject under discussion. The consequences of this attitude are most serious. Indeed, I go so far as to say that the malleous wrecks that have occurred lately should be charged to the editorial offices of the daily newspapers. By those newspapers the railroads are treated as outlaws. People of feeble reasoning powers and of emotional temperament are easily led to think that it is proper to attack an outlaw in any way that amuses them or gratifies their hatred or envy.

Railroad Officials "Just Like the Rest of Us."

You know and I know that the great mass of the owners of the railroads are honest and law-abiding citizens. You know and I know that the directors and administrative officers of the railroads are just like the rest of us—no better and no worse. In intelligence and executive capacity they rank high, because they are disciplined in an exacting school, and they are selected because of their capacity to carry responsibility. In moral character they are probably above rather than below the average. The assumption that they are scheming to cheat their neighbors, that they are trying to contrive ways to annoy their patrons, that they are indifferent and incompetent in practical operation of their railroads, would sound childish if it were not so serious and so far-reaching in its consequences.

Of course, we know that wrong things are done by railroad officers. We have heard, for instance, a great deal about rebates; but if we reflect, we discover that rebates are not new, simply they have been made illegal. We know that they have been used for years, and even for generations, as a means of building up communities and industries along lines of railroads. Probably, in the primitive times many of those railroad managers who granted rebates thought that they were doing a correct and public-spirited thing. Unfortunately, correct notions about these matters are almost never presented in the daily press.

It seems to me that it is a duty of the officers of the railroad companies, and those who are closely related to railroad companies, and who have means of special information, to try to build up correct public opinion. This some of us can do by talk with our neighbors; some of us by occasionally writing for publication here and there; some of us by an occasional public speech; some of us by direct personal contact with our senators and representatives in congress and the members of our state legislatures. It seems to me that this is an obvious and neglected duty that all of us can perform, and, in the aggregate, with a good deal of profit; and it is a duty, not to the railroads alone, but to the nation.

George Watt, of New York City, arrived here last evening on business.

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