

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

by MAX NEF.

(Competition between Rail and Road: proposed measures.)

In all countries the competition ratio between rail and road traffic constitutes a problem with which the authorities have to deal and which can hardly be solved without the co-operation of the State. The starting point is the same everywhere, but the solutions chosen are manifold in character.

In Switzerland, a Final Report drawn up by a Committee of Experts, which was set up for the purpose of studying this matter, has now been approved by the Federal Council and has been made public. Its perusal shows that there is no ready-made recipe by means of which these difficult and very far reaching questions can be settled. Rather, is it intended to tackle these difficulties by means of a whole series of separate measures, which are, nevertheless, connected with each other, and thus form a whole.

Whereas in the other countries of Europe it is the State itself which has settled matters, either by means of simple administrative measures, or else through the edicting of special laws, in Switzerland these ways have not attained the purpose aimed at, up to the present. It is true that during the last few years several attempts have been undertaken, partly through the elaboration of a special Article of the Constitution, which would have invested the State with the necessary competency, and partly by means of agreements which would have been declared obligatory for all associations directly engaged in transport, and which, would later on, have been incorporated into a Law, and partly, also, through an endeavour to regulate the whole matter through a special Law on the distribution of traffic. All these efforts, however, proved vain, in view of the fact that they were rejected when submitted to a Popular Referendum. Thus, ever since 1926, that is to say, for nearly thirty years, it has proved impossible to achieve a final solution. The fact that it has proved impossible to achieve a legal status for all the suggestions put forward up to the present, because the people refused to give their approval, is due partly to the aversion of Swiss people to any State intervention in economic problems, and partly to the very complicated technical questions involved, which made it difficult to win over the citizen voter by means of practical orientation and explanation.

In this new attempt, the way of voluntary agreement between the circles directly interested in transport, has now been chosen. It is true that this is a somewhat more fussy procedure than that of allowing the State to settle the matter by means of an Ordinance, as has been done abroad, but it is a typically Swiss way and, with patience and tenacity, it will no doubt achieve its purpose.

To start with, the Railways have concluded an agreement with the road hauling trades, on the subject of division of long distance traffic. This agreement has been in force for some time, now, and as far as one can judge, it would appear to have proved satisfactory. An attempt is now to be made to bring the so-called short-distance traffic under the same regulations. On the basis of experience gained in this way, it will then be possible to develop this system.

Difficulties arise, however, from the fact that there exists no proper balance in the hypothesis for bringing about an equalisation in competitive relations between the railways and the automobile (these being the chief transport means involved). What is to be done therefore, is to equalise in so far as is possible, the competitive conditions.

The railways feel that they are at a disadvantage, on various points, in regard to motor traffic. For one thing, they are bound by transport regulations to carry goods, which are of no interest to them and this at rates which don't even cover the costs, whereas road haulage concerns are free to pick and choose what they will take. Furthermore, contrary to what is the case for motor vehicles, the railways have to stick to the scheduled time-table and trains have to run even then when they are not fully loaded. The railways must also carry out a commutation service for suburban dwellers and provide a service for workers going to and from their jobs, at reduced rates, on social grounds, and this must be crowded in during the rush hours. To this must be added further duties, some of which are politically conditioned, which are looked upon as being burdens foreign to the railways and which lead to business losses. Whereas in other countries it is generally the State which makes itself responsible for this expenditure, or else covers the resultant deficit, in Switzerland, the railways have got to fend for themselves in these matters. Thus, the idea has now been born that the railways ought to be compensated for this, in some way or another, and, under the circumstances, by means of a compensatory tax on motor vehicles.

Motor traffic also has the advantage over the railways, in that it bears only a small share of the cost of road building and road maintenance, by paying taxes and rates, whereas the railways have to pay for all their technical installations, themselves.

Theoretically, a balance could be achieved if the burden were to be made lighter for the railways, or else heavier for motor vehicles, or if these two means were somehow bound together. What solution will be chosen rests with the authorities and, ultimately, with legislator. The recently published Experts' Report shows the various possibilities and assembles all the necessary particulars, which are indispensable for the formation of a judgement.

CITY SWISS CLUB

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MONTHLY MEETING

will take place on **Tuesday, 14th September, 1954**, at the **DORCHESTER HOTEL, W.1.**

Our guest of honour at the Dinner (**7 p.m.** for **7.30 p.m.**) will be **SIR STANLEY ROUS, C.B.E.**, Secretary of the Football Association.

THE COMMITTEE.