

A REPUBLICAN PAPER ON GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP

The New York Press is a stalwart republican paper, having in recent years strong anti-monopoly leanings. In its issue of September 9 the Press printed the following editorial:

The corporation organs are going rather too fast in "proving" that Mr. Bryan's public ownership of railroads is the most revolutionary thing that ever happened. There is nothing about this suggestion nearly so radical as Mr. Bryan's preposterous proposition of ten years ago that it was possible to put more than double its value into silver merely by fixing a stamp on it. Public ownership of railroads is no new thing in the civilized world. Most of the railroads of the world, outside of the United States, are public property and are operated by government. The principle of public ownership of the public highways—and the railroad is the modern public highway—has been recognized and observed in our own country from the very beginning of the republic.

The wagon roads were built by the public, operated by the public and the tolls were paid into the public treasury. So with the canals, which were the next development of the public highway for enlarged means of transportation. There is nothing revolutionary in the idea that the state should provide the highway, whether a pike, a canal or a railway; operate it and make the traffic rates equal to all who use it. Judge Gaylor has pointed out that this fundamental principle governs all the judicial decisions which have been given on this subject.

The matter of operating these railroad highways as public property or as private property is merely an economic question. The American

people are not yet convinced that the public can administer a railroad so efficiently as private management can. But the issue is not only the cost of operation; it is the cost to the general public of the service performed, both directly in the rate charged on the transportation and indirectly—and of vastly more consequence—in the cost to that general public of having its production, distribution and marketing controlled by Standard Oil trusts, coal trusts, steel trusts, etc.

It is of slight satisfaction to the general public to have private management operate transportation lines more cheaply than public administration when all the benefits of that more efficient private management go into the pockets of the private owners and operators. It is of incalculable injury to the general public that allies of the transportation trust can be so favored that all their competitors can be exterminated and that the consuming public can be placed completely at the mercy of the sugar trusts, the oil trusts, the steel trusts, the coal trusts and the beef trusts in the prices extorted for heat and shelter and raiment and food. A publicly owned and publicly operated national transportation system might actually raise freight charges, because of the inability of the government to conduct railroads so successfully as the Hills and Harrimans, and yet confer incalculable blessings on the nation by giving to every one a "square deal," whereby there could be an equality of transportation rates and consequent competition in producing and in selling.

The great evil of private ownership of railroads in partnership with other trusts, is that discriminations in rates make it impossible for any one but the trust partner to do business. When competition is destroyed and when a market is controlled the public man, and very often does, pay four and five times as much for what is consumed as is theoretically saved in lower traffic rates than could be obtained from public ownership of transportation facilities. It makes no difference to the independent shipper how much lower his rate is than the rate of the shipper in Europe if the trust which is eliminating him gets a still lower rate than he does. If he has to pay a bigger freight rate than the trust he must quit trying to sell against the trust. When he quits the public is taxed with higher prices on the articles transported.

Ten years ago pretty nearly all the people of the United States were agreed that the way out of this predicament for the general public was to permit the private owners to retain and operate their railroads, but for the government to regulate the rates

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