

# Can Our Railroads Come Back?

## A Review of Certain Phases of This Most Important Question

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One of the most important questions before the people of this country, since the return of our railways to their owners, has been, "Can they come back?" and although our ablest railway executives, statesmen, bankers and writers have devoted much time to the subject, yet there still seems to be a wide range of opinion or diversity of thought, both as to responsibility for their condition, proper remedial measures, and what progress has resulted from their application.

To come direct to the point at issue, I would say, yes, they *can* come back, and considering the stupendous task involved have made *wonderful* progress in that direction.

Just what the final outcome will be is of course at present somewhat problematic, although it can be safely said without fear of successful contradiction, that if the railways are accorded fair treatment by the Government and all others at interest *they will come back*, and by this same token the writer has no hesitancy in saying, that if the railways had been accorded fair treatment by the Government both prior to and during the war, they would not today, as a whole, be in a condition to warrant the general criticism now directed against them.

Having thus defined my position and taken issue with certain railway critics, it seems quite proper my reasons should be clearly set forth.

First, while I hold no brief to defend either the Railways or the Public, and do not hesitate to admit instances of mismanagement or wrongdoing on the part of the railways in the past, yet with equal frankness I hold the railways *were not* treated fairly in the past and are not today receiving the aid and cordial support essential to their success.

For more than thirty years many of those seeking political preference or other worldly gain seemed to specialize in corporate abuse with particular reference to railways. True, there has been and are now some brilliant exceptions to whom credit is due, but so large a majority of those who influence or mould public opinion have either openly denounced our railway owners and managers, or charged them with inefficiency in various degrees, with the result that the public mind has been systematically poisoned against the railways in general, and one of the most effective methods of aiding in their early and complete recovering would be for every person and all agencies to lend a helping hand—being particularly careful that by no act of omission or commis-

sion should progress in this direction be impeded.

Doubtless many well intentioned public speakers or writers, who are not really unfriendly to the railways at heart, use information not wholly reliable or correct, thus reflecting adversely on efficiency of management, when if they had made proper inquiry, an injustice to the railways might have been avoided.

Among numerous instances of the foregoing character there recently appeared in a popular publication, with a circulation of close to one million, and that is probably read by several million people who are more or less influenced by its contents, an article on this subject which, while not wholly excusing the Government for certain shortcomings, placed the burden of responsibility on the railway managements—in other words, a verdict of guilt was rendered, while much of the evidence should be *thrown out*.

This article is selected for criticism as it deals with railway service and the equipment provided, in which the public generally is most interested, as compared with that abroad. It is an example of the class of material that is accepted by the editors of newspapers and popular magazines, that has had such pernicious effect on the attitude of our people to the railways.

Our critic maintains, "It has been said that the traditional efficiency of the American railway, its traditional superiority to any other railways in the world, is a thing of the past." He continues, "we have always thought of our trains as the fastest in the world, *they are not*." Then to prove this, English and French schedules are compared with ours, adding that the greater comfort of sleeping car travel abroad is another feature in which we are lacking. Let us see. In any comparison the elements must be reduced to similar or comparable terms and on this, the only equitable basis of comparison, I hold that neither the English, French or any other nation runs trains of such tonnage and speed as we do in this country. The English and French trains maintained are fast trains, but their equipment is very light as compared to ours, and if one of their fast passenger engines was coupled to one of our heavy all steel, through passenger trains, it would not be able to even approach our speed schedules, and to think of using the light cars and trains commonly used over there would be entirely out of the question.

Aside from the issue of the weight of the trains, we have here schedules better than any in sustained high speed. As a

matter of fact, some years ago there were schedules in France and England where with light trains they approximated our high speed passenger runs, but there have been extensions in their schedules generally, and on the whole there is no longer any basis for comparison in respect to fast passenger schedules. Some high speed records may be of interest;

Of twenty-four fast runs ranging from 63 to 120 miles per hour I find 21 were made in the U. S. and 2 or about 10 per cent in England. Of the 24 runs 3 exceeded 100 miles per hour all in U. S. One it was reported having reached a speed of 120 miles per hour for a short distance. (See *World Encyclopedia*, 1922, page 337.) The writer has ridden on both English and French high speed passenger engines that made splendid records, but the weight of trains were as a rule about one-half the weight of our trains and their permanent way or track favorable to higher speeds than ours. Incidentally the writer may be pardoned for mentioning that the engine credited with making 120 miles per hour was of his design and he was riding in the cab when this run was made.

Quite recently an engine on the Union Pacific R. R. took a train of 816 tons at a speed of 50 miles per hour on an ascending grade of 0.82 per cent. The engine developed an indicated horsepower of 3,500. No engine in England or France ever made such a record and the writer very much doubts if any two of their passenger engines could equal this performance.

On comparable terms we are providing the fastest passenger train service, and by any fair measure of value the Pullman service is the equivalent of best in sleeping car equipment anywhere in the world today.

### LOCOMOTIVE EQUIPMENT

Second, all this foreign "superiority" is due to the use of "ultra-modern equipment." Our railways are out of date or old-fashioned in not using modern up-to-date appliances on locomotives, such as (a) Superheaters; (b) Brick archers; (c) Feed water heaters; (d) Boosters; (e) Mechanical stokers. "All much used abroad; are making slow progress here." Let us see as to who is, and who is not making progress along these lines.

### Superheaters:

Our critic maintains that the Baltimore and Ohio uses a superheater with good results, thus implying other roads do not but should use it and thus be up to date.

The Baltimore and Ohio is a well man-

aged property. They use superheaters with good results, and so does almost every other railroad of consequence in the United States. Superheaters have been put into nearly every locomotive that is being built, and have been for fifteen years. There are about 38,000 locomotives in England and France combined, 65 percent of which have superheaters. In the United States there are about 68,000 locomotives, and of these 42,000 are fitted with superheaters, and they are being applied to old locomotives at the rate of a thousand a year. So we can justly claim leadership in the use of this device.

**Brick Arches:**

Brick arches have been practically standard practice of American locomotive engineering for years. Seventy per cent of all our locomotives are equipped with them.

**Feed Water Heaters:**

This is a device that shares great economy in stationary plants but is not so easily applicable to locomotives. The designers of American locomotives have not been and are not now asleep on this question. There are so many complications in the way of immediate introduction; the quality of the water, the rate of consumption, and above all the necessity that there shall never be any failure of the supply; that they have been obliged to go more slowly.

Manufacturers here have been experimenting with the device for years and it is only recently that they have had one that they could offer as dependable. Yet with all the necessity for extreme caution they are being steadily introduced and there are now a substantial number in service. Here again, our enthusiastic detractor should have his attention called to the vastly greater quantities of water used on American locomotive as compared with the European.

The American Railways certainly stand in the front ranks of those who use ultra-modern equipment.

**Electrification of Steam Lines:**

The next feature to which attention is invited is that of electrification, which of course is good in its place, but our detractors go beyond the most enthusiastic of the electricians in prescribing it for universal use. The places where its introduction means economical operation are continually increasing, and its extension will follow, but there is absolutely no ground for the general implication that wonderful savings at once result, and as our critic sets up many items such as 45 engines doing the work of 120, saving coal and oil fuel of 259,000 tons and 31,700,000 gallons with many other factors which effect operating expense. Electrification is in substance offered as a solution of financial problems.

The writer is heartily in favor of electrification of railways wherever it is *physi-*

*cally feasible* and *financially possible*, and by this token the proposition must stand or fall. Measured by this standard of financial success, let us see just what are the results on the St. Paul and New Haven.

The Santa Fe, Union Pacific, Northern Pacific and Great Northern railways cross the mountains, and could impound water for hydro-electric motive power purposes the same as the St. Paul. The same is true as to certain lines in New England territory. Yet if one were to judge the

to most all railroad men that the carriers have not even yet recovered from the adverse effects or blight of government control, and until they have again been free agents long enough to put this house in order, criticism, except of the constructive order that would tend to strengthen their hands, would seem to be quite out of place.

Capital, no matter whether it be the savings of the worker, a person of wealth, or the funds of an institution, will automatically flow in the direction of *safe, sound* investment and *fair* return thereon.

Name of road	Electrified		Price of stock and dividend rate				Amount paid to Share holders since 1917
	Yes or no	Date	Then		Now		
Santa Fe.....	No	.....	100	6%	100	6%	Millions
Union Pacific.....	No	.....	125	8%	140	10%	Millions
Northern Pacific.....	No	.....	108	7%	75	5%	Millions
Great Northern.....	No	.....	120	7%	83	7%	Millions
St. Paul.....	Yes	1915 Com.	{ 100C.	4%	24	0	Millions
New Haven.....	Yes	1915-1907	{ 125P.	7%	36	0	Nothing
			200	8%	21	0	Nothing

financial results from operation in the light of our critic's claims for electrification, the only conclusion would be that the first four roads were electrified, and the last two were still clinging to what our critic would imply is the antiquated extravagant steam locomotive, which conclusion is entirely unfounded.

The writer does not hold the unfavorable financial condition of these two properties mentioned was brought about through financing electrification—in fact, it is fair to assume that other causes were largely responsible, and it is also safe to say that if both properties had not been in the hands of exceedingly capable executives for some years past, they would in *spite* of the *electric feature* have been in the hands of receivers, while the future of each is not at present any too rosy.

**RAILWAY BREAKDOWN AND GOVERNMENT CONTROL**

Our critic now refers to the so-called railway breakdown in 1917 government control which followed and the wonderful things accomplished by Mr. McAdoo.

The failure in 1917 was largely due to a parsimonious policy of the various authoritative bodies which have to do with rates and other factors which had over a long period operated to prevent the managements of our railways from being kept in shape to handle the business, and as proof of this about the first thing Mr. McAdoo did was to boost the rates horizontally away above what the carriers had been vainly trying for years to get. Then followed wage increases and national agreements that practically destroyed the efficiency of lines as transportation units and in this wretched impoverished condition they were thrown back to their owners over night, and the next afternoon papers in many cities were at once demanding to know why they were not getting better service and threatening government ownership as a penalty.

A majority of writers and speakers still lean in that direction, although it is clear

Hundreds of millions of dollars during the past five or six years have been directed, much of it at great loss, from railroad securities to (a) farm loans, (b) municipal paper, (c) industrial securities, and (d) government bonds of a low interest-bearing rate, for the plain simple business reason that the public have been afraid of, and are yet, owing to this insidious propaganda, quite shy of railroad securities, which of course impairs their credit.

The Interstate Commerce Commission and other authoritative bodies agree that their present earnings are inadequate for proper maintenance and return to the shareholder.

If all people who do not from personal knowledge thoroughly understand the railway situation, will keep their mouths shut on this subject for a reasonable time, and all those who do understand it will be given proper consideration and aid from the public and all regulatory and legislative bodies, the flow of capital will turn to railroad securities, business will boom, and then if the carriers do not make good, call them to account in terms void of ambiguity.

**Cost of Locomotive Operation**

It is well known that the cost of locomotive operation is one of the principal items in railroad expenditures. What this is is set forth by the recent estimate of a road in the Middle West. According to the figures given the total cost of locomotive operation for this road, for 1920, was \$74,454,628 and the cost per locomotive owned per annum was \$34,029. The survey showed that of the total sum, \$28,789,756 went for fuel; \$26,462,086 for repairs; \$81,442,173 for wages of the enginemen, firemen and enginehouse employees; \$424,917 for lubricants, and other supplies, \$335,696. Of the cost of running a single engine, \$13,158 went for fuel; \$12,094 for repairs; \$8,429 for wages; \$194 for lubricants and \$153 for other supplies.