

S R U B L U K

The Society for the Reinvigoration of Unremunerative Branch Lines in the United Kingdom

The Branch Line Reinvigoration Society

PROGRESS REPORT - FEBRUARY, 1960.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENT. Members are reminded that the Annual General Meeting will take place in April, and full details will be published in the March circular.

PUBLIC MEETING - 27 JANUARY, 1960, at Friends' House, Euston Road, London, N.W.1.

This meeting, at which the guest speaker was Mr. L.J.Roll, one of our most active members, chose as his subject - "On opposing the closure of a Railway - from local to ministerial level".

There was a good attendance at this meeting, and the Committee noted with gratification the number of members present from the Provinces. In view of the importance of this subject, we are going to give a precis of Mr. Roll's Address.

Mr. Roll began his talk with a brief review of his early days with the former Midland and Great Northern Joint Railway, to which his entire talk was devoted. At a very early age he moved to Great Yarmouth, living in the angle of Caister Road Junction, between the two lines from Yarmouth Beach to North Walsham Town and to Lowestoft Central, respectively; so naturally his life-long association with the line began there. On leaving school he was unable to obtain employment on the Railway due to the Depression; and his interest lay more in the traffic than in the engineering side, and in 1926 he began to keep records of passenger traffic movements in and out of Yarmouth Beach Station. In 1930 he moved to Stamford and kept up his M. & G.N. interest at Bourne.

For many years the M. & G.N.'s extermination had been eagerly desired by many folk, not least by the Great Eastern Railway, and the first nail in the coffin was the 1933 pooling of receipts by the "Big Four". This meant that whatever the fortunes of any line, the "rake-off" to the companies was in proportion - therefore there was no incentive. The L.N.E.R. took over the running of the M. & G.N. in 1936, and it was intended that the L.M.S.R. should

do so 10 years later; but of course things turned out to be very different under nationalisation, when every line had to pay its way.

In June 1958 came the announcement of the proposed closure of the M. & G.N. Line. People were stunned by the news, and many letters of consternation were received; no one knew what to do. Mr. Roll soon realised that if no one else was going to act, he would have to, so he saw the editor of his local paper, and was given four columns for his letter suggesting improvements in the line's working, e.g., a reasonable degree of dieselisation; transfer from G.E. to L.M.R. administration; engineering reports on bridges by independent bridging engineers; and conversion of some stations to unstaffed halts. The reaction of railwaymen was immediate; they realised at last that they had a champion. Mr. Roll then visited the editors of the Norwich papers, but they would not publish anything. Railway Inspector Atto, at Melton Constable, led the fight at the eastern end of the line, and the editor of the local paper kept it going. Mr. Roll then produced his "Twenty Awkward Questions" for the benefit of the British Transport Commission, to which no satisfactory answers were ever received. On hearing from General Robertson and Brigadier Wilson the oft-repeated lie that the M. & G.N. never paid its way, Mr. Roll wrote to the Board of Trade and obtained photostat copies of the accounts of the M. & G.N. Jt. Railway for a number of years. From these it was seen that in the six years prior to 1933 (the year that the pooling arrangements came into force), excepting that of the depression, a total profit of £177,000 was earned. These figures, it should be noted, were of Nett Profit, not Gross Profit. Various Councils formed Committees to oppose the closure. Further investigation had revealed that many trains that could - and should - have travelled by the M. & G.N. Route were in fact sent over the G.E. Route to Yarmouth Vauxhall, e.g., the 12:00 from Manchester (Victoria) to King's Lynn, Cromer (Beach), Yarmouth (Beach), and Lowestoft (Central). The Public Relations Officer, when questioned about this, never replied. (It would appear that there is no reply that the B.T.C. could make and still save face). The publication of the B.T.C.'s case, complete with accounts, was evasive and feeble in the extreme, and contained absolutely nothing refuting the accusations against it; in fact, it deliberately withdrew facts on which it could be "shot down". It was significant that it avoided answering any of Mr. Roll's "Twenty Awkward Questions" to which there had been much publicity.

Opposition grew, and for the section west of King's Lynn, a meeting was to be held at Spalding, which Mr. Roll was to address; before the meeting took place, however, the B.T.C. made a shrewd move, and agreed to keep certain freight spurs, which suited the majority of traders very nicely. Therefore it was not surprising that this meeting at which Mr. Roll spoke for three-quarters of an hour outlining the manner in which opposition to the closure could take, was lukewarm in its enthusiasm. Another meeting was held at Shirehall, Norwich, but unfortunately Mr. Roll was not invited to this one.

Then came the T.U.C.C. hearings, and these bodies scored heavily by insisting (wrongly) on dealing with objections only in the areas in which the objectors lived. (East Anglia or East Midlands).

An example of how farcical T.U.C.C.'s can, and sometimes now, have become, was amply shewn at Norwich, where the Chairman of the Eastern T.U.C.C. shamefully bullied the objectors: for instance, Mr. Roll's objection was cut short once it was known that he was not resident in the Eastern T.U.C.C. Area; similar treatment was handed out to a man who began by saying that he was in the British Legion at Murrow - he was asked what that had to do with keeping open the M. & G.N.; again, a man who grew mushrooms at Martham was brushed aside curtly by being asked - "Why do you think British Railways should run trains just for your benefit; why not grow your mushrooms nearer Yarmouth?"

Mr. Roll then said that objectors received more sympathetic treatment at the hands of the Chairman of the East Midlands T.U.C.C. at Bourne, where Professor Peers presided - incidentally he figured in the more recent Banbury (Merton Street) - Buckingham case. The Professor was impressed by the M. & G.N. case, but the outcome was the same dreary old tale - there was nothing they could do, so that it was obviously cut and dried before the hearing began.

Mr. Roll finished by saying that Railway Inspector Atto and the Norfolk County Council are now asking for a Public Inquiry. Mr. Roll's case was sent to Parliament; a deputation, in which he was included, did get as far as General Robertson's Office, was heard, and was told "We will inform you". In the meantime demolition is proceeding, which in the case of the Yarmouth end of the line can only be described as at breakneck speed (the first rails - in some sidings - were lifted even before the last train had run) and track lifting crews started work on the following Monday morning. As might be expected, nothing further has been heard from General Robertson's Office.

A spirited discussion followed, in which many observations, questions and suggestions were put: of which the following are a fair sample:-

That passengers should have a book (or carnet) of tickets for use at unstaffed halts;

That the B.T.C. feel no obligation to provide alternative bus services; this was confirmed by the fact that where these have been provided as an alternative facility at the time of a line's closure, they have in many cases been withdrawn after only two or three months, on the grounds of being "unremunerative";

That if the branches die, the main trunk of the tree will wither;

That Mr. Roll had written for a breakdown of the accounting figures for the Stamford - Essendine Services, but this request was refused. He gave an instance of typical B.T.C. accounting procedure - e.g., where a train proceeds from Leicester to Yarmouth (Beach) (Outer Journey), ticket proceeds go to the originating region; but the costs are debited to the branch line (viz., M. & G.N.). (SRUBLUK knew of cases where on certain branches ticket sales off the branch to stations on the branch are credited entirely to the booking station, whilst bookings in the reverse direction fares are credited to the branch station only as far as the junction with the main line - the junction station takes credit for the remainder.)

That the "divide and conquer" policy of T.U.C.C. hearings has also ensured the withdrawal of through Great Central Services to Sheffield(Victoria); in fact there was a complete lack of unity for objectors. Although most T.U.C.C.'s were courteous and acted in the manner laid down by the Ministry of Transport (having been rebuked for previous departures therefrom), the B.T.C. invariably had its way, and the T.U.C.C. set up (as at present constituted) became little more than a legal facade and a rubber stamp for which the Commission intended to do.

That the M. & G.N. Preservation Society had been thwarted in its attempt to re-open the Yarmouth (Beach) - North Walsham Section, as the track had been lifted for much of the distance; and the road bed was to be sold for road transport. Mr. Roll was of the opinion that it was a waste of time to think that it would be possible to obtain running powers over the Norwich (City) - Melton Constable Section, since freight is being run at present over the whole of this section, and in due course over the Norwich (City) - Reepham Section.

That the two classic examples of the policy of "absorb and wipe out" are (a) The M. & G.N./G.E., and (b) G.C./L.M.R.

That T.U.C.C.'s should be abolished, or at any rate be altered drastically to be in the form of a judicial enquiry, with a High Court Judge presiding. The T.U.C.C.'s (and the Commission) score heavily with their policy of "divide and conquer".

MIDLAND & GREAT NORTHERN JOINT RAILWAY PRESERVATION SOCIETY RAILTOUR

We are asked to publish details of a railtour that it is proposed to run on 21 May next, and that will traverse two lines in East Anglia that are normally closed to Passenger Traffic. They are the Waveney Valley Line, and the Norwich City Branch of the M. & G.N., sections of both of these lines are threatened with complete closure in the near future, and this will be the last opportunity to travel over them in their present form.

The train, which will be hauled by a J 15, will consist of ex-M. & G.N. Stock (or G.E.) Corridor Stock.

The timings are as follows:-

Norwich(City)	dep	12:20 pm
Whitwell and Reepham	arr	12:48
	dep	12:55
Melton Constable	arr	1:12
	dep	1:27
North Walsham (Main)	arr	2:15
	dep	2:35
Tivetshall	arr	3:33
	dep	3:40
Harleston	arr	4:10
	dep	4:18
Bungay	arr	4:58
	dep	5: 6
Beccles	arr	5:21
	dep	5:28
Lowestoft (Central)	arr	5:43
	dep	5:50
Norwich (Thorpe)	arr	6:30

This tour covers over 130 miles, of which more than 40 miles are closed to passenger traffic.

The fare for this tour will be approximately 16/- and all those interested should write, stating the number of tickets required, to Mr. B.Clark, 578, Eastern Avenue, Ilford, Essex. Reduced fares may be available from London if the demand should warrant it.

As we go to press, the final arguments "to strike or not to strike, that is the question" are being thrashed out. Without entering into any of the arguments for and against the members of the N.U.R. taking strike action, one thing is certain: every time there is a rail strike, a large number of passengers obtain their own transport for use during the strike, and afterwards do not return to the railway, and make worse the congestion on the roads. Every strike means a financial loss to the railways, and after the strike is over the Commission seeks to redress the imbalance caused in this way by speeding up the closure of branch lines, thereby depriving more members of the N.U.R. of jobs - and so the spiral starts again. What a pity the Railway Unions do not (or will not) realise by making the railways uneconomic, they are steadily and surely killing their own jobs.

OTHER RECENT MATTERS OF INTEREST

The service on the Banbury (Merton Street) to Buckingham Branch, which was being withdrawn, was to be replaced by a bus service by a local company. This company has refused to provide the bus service, owing to financial difficulties. The rail service has accordingly been restored. Although this is only a temporary measure, it will be interesting to see what happens next.

Mention was made recently of the unsatisfactory arrangements regarding excursion tickets from Cheltenham to London. It is understood that Excursion Tickets are now available from Cheltenham (St. James') also at 8:50 am and 11:45 am; also from Cheltenham South (Leckhampton) at 6:38 am. Although this is welcome, SRUBLUK cannot commend Western Region for the obscure manner of the announcements regarding these facilities.

Mr. Procktor of Sheffield reports that a motion has been passed at a meeting of the local Ramblers' Association deploring the action of British Railways in withdrawing train services alleged to be running at a loss, since the Commission claim to provide a Public Service, analagous to the Post Office, and they call for a reversal of this policy on the grounds of the Public Interest. In a further letter he stated that a copy of the motion had been passed to the Headquarters of the Commission, the Central Transport Users Consultative Committee, and the Headquarters of the Ramblers' Association. He also mentioned that as well as the Great Central Lines, the Commission wanted to close the Dore - Chinley Line,

out that there is likely to be strong opposition to such a proposal as the line is well patronised and also serves a part of the Peak National Park; the Planning Board of which are likely to oppose closure also.

Mr. John G. Ramsay, 1 East Trinity Road, Edinburgh, 5, is proposing to take up active SRUBLUK work, and will all members working or living in South East Scotland please get in touch with him.

We understand that at the turn of the year at a at a Southern Region Social Function in the Exeter Area, the District Superintendent gave the official view regarding a number of branches under his jurisdiction as follows:-

Yeovil - Taunton, and Chard Jct. - Chard - No changes proposed;

Taunton - Chard - may be closed entirely (by Western Region);

Seaton Junction - Seaton - Unremunerative, but no immediate changes proposed;

Axminster - Lyme Regis - "Will probably change over to the "One Engine in Steam" method of working;

Sidmouth Jct. - Sidmouth, and Tipton St. John's to Exmouth - No changes;

Exeter - Exmouth - Dieselisation deferred until about 1963, when a 20-minute interval service to Exmouth has been proposed, with some trains extended to Budleigh Salterton. If Western Region agree, the diesels might combine the working of the Exe Valley Branch to provide through services between Tiverton and Budleigh Salterton, via Exeter (St. David's).

Mr. Bellows of Gloucester reports that the passenger services on the Kemble - Tetbury and Kemble - Cirencester (Town) may be withdrawn; he has heard from the Commission that there is no immediate threat of closure (perhaps the interest of Sir Brian Robertson in the latter line might have something to do with this!), that the position is being reviewed. Although the services were improved with diesel railbuses, and new halts were opened, the position is not satisfactory financially. As regards the railcar service on the Cheltenham - Honeybourne line, they are, apparently definitely going to be withdrawn. The line will be kept open, however, only for the Birmingham - South Wales diesels.

Mr. Postel, of Brighton, who is still the Secretary of the Lewes - East Grinstead Transport and Facilities Committee is still very hot under the collar regarding the Bluebell Line affair, but he has now turned his attention to the Newhaven - Dieppe steamer service. Although this is somewhat outside SRUBLUK's normal terms of reference, we think readers might be interested in the action of the Commission over the withdraw of these steamers during the winter months.

Mr. Bostel went to the first Committee Meeting of the South East Transport Users Consultative Committee at Lewes, after which the first closure was authorized; subsequently he went to the second one in London last year, and members of S.R.U.B.L.U.K. will probably not be surprized to learn that in spite of the representations of the local authorities of Newhaven, Brighton, and Hove, the Commission flatly refused to disclose the operating costs of the service during the summer, or during the period of the proposed closure! Mr. Bostel asked for these figures at the meeting, he was refused, and on asking why, was told that they were irrelevant!

And finally Mr. Powell of Sidmouth Junction passes on the information that, in response to requests, the Commission are introducing a new express service at 5:45 pm from Exeter(Central) to Exmouth, mainly for the convenience of the large number of season ticket holders who travel on this route; the train will be extended to Littleham and Budleigh Salterton. It is also announced that a new through train will run from the midlands and north on Summer Saturdays, leaving Cleethorpes at 7 am, calling at Grimsby, Lincoln, Newark, Nottingham, Leicester, Birmingham, Cheltenham, Gloucester, Bath, Exeter, and dividing for Exmouth and Sidmouth, arriving about 5 pm. The return working will leave about 10:30 am, making the same calls. Branch connections will be made to Lyme Regis and Seaton. Mr. Powell also refers to the building up in the passenger traffic on the line from Budleigh Salterton to Exeter via Exmouth, with improved morning and evening services. Compared with a year ago, Littleham Station is now crowded every morning; a year ago there were only 5 regular passengers to Exeter. So not all branch lines are reporting declining traffic! The Budleigh Salterton Chamber of Commerce have asked the Commission for more through coaches to and from Sidmouth Junction in connection with the principal Main Line trains, and the Divisional Superintendent is considering the provision of a through coach to and from Exmouth to be attached to and detached from the Sidmouth Branch train at Tipton St. John's on four of the existing services in each direction.

We have had quite a lot of news in from members this time: please keep it up. If you have some news, why not share it with the rest of the members?

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