

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 - MAY, 1960.

THE NEW COMMITTEE.

The new committee, elected at the Annual General Meeting held on 30 April, 1960, is as follows:-

CHAIRMAN Mr. G.F.Manley, 42 Hillsborough Court, London N.W.6.

HON. TREASURER Mr. P.E.Postgate, 173 Barnsbury Road, London, N.1.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY (To be notified in due course)

EDITOR Mr. K.G.Judd, 68, Mayfield Avenue, Orpington, Kent.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS Mr. J.W.Barfield, Central House, Finsbury Square,
London, E.C.2.

Mr. M.P.L.Caton, 10 Grosvenor Gardens, Upminster, Essex.

Mr. J.P.Groves, 46 Stonepark Avenue, Beckenham, Kent.

Mr. W.Morris, 166 Ferndale Road, London S.W.4.

Mr. C.J.Polkinghorne, 20 Ridge Crest, Enfield, Middx.

CO-OPTED MEMBERS Mr. D.F.Freeman, 20 The Avenue, Loughton, Essex.

Mr. G.R.Hooper, 124, Queens Road, Buckhurst Hill, Essex.

Mr. John Mair, 67 Bromefield, Stanmore, Middx.

PROCEEDINGS OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING. The A.G.M. took place at Friends' House, Euston Road, London N.W.1, and overleaf commences the Chairman's report, as presented at the meeting. However, the Committee was disappointed at the small attendance when the Committee are presenting an account of their stewardship; it is felt however that as small attendance shows that the majority of the membership are satisfied with the manner in which the Society continues to be run. It is only in Public Companies where the management is inept (or worse) that the Annual General Meetings are well attended!

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT. The Chairman opened his address by saying that as the majority of the business of the Society had already been passed on to members through the monthly Progress Report, he did not propose to elaborate on these matters. He did, however, wish to take the opportunity to thank Mr. Judd for his work as Editor of the Progress Report.

The Chairman then discussed the Guillebaud Report, and its effect upon the work of SRUBLUK. He said that it was not the report itself, but its consequences that would affect the Society. The three main recommendations of the report were then outlined, and the Chairman stated that the future of the Railways was in the melting pot, in view of the points raised. Under the heading of "More Pay for Railwaymen" which would probably result in higher fares for railwaymen than those at present in force or announced, and would accordingly be used as a reason for a hastening of the closure of branch lines. It was not disputed that these wage increases were necessary, particularly in the case of certain grades, such as signalmen who had considerable responsibilities, and in whose hands rested the responsibility for so many lives. Under "Better Working Conditions and Amenities" the question of the proposed Office Regulations was raised, as Railwaymen were often required to work in very bad conditions, and much more money would be required to improve offices for railway employees in order to bring them up to modern standards. No objection could be seen to these recommendations. The third recommendation - "that of antiquated and over complex clerical work in Railway Offices, resulting in a waste of manpower" and savings could be made in this direction. However, this was outside the terms of reference of the Report.

The Society, therefore, was placing its views before the Committee of Enquiry set up by the Minister of Transport to consider ways and means of bringing railway administration in closer accord with modern practice.

The question of improvements in organisation, clerical work, and freight charges were then touched on, and the Chairman expressed the view that the Railways should go out to seek traffic and that in this connection de-centralisation would be a good thing. Centralisation (within limits) would be necessary, however, to operate such a scheme.

The question of Public Relations was then mentioned by the Chairman, which seemed frequently to be inefficient or non-existent. He mentioned the case of

a hotel at Bude in which he was staying recently, where there were cards exhibited of the local bus and coach services - and also of the Railway services; but the Railway details were last summer's - and thus about six months out of date. More initiative was needed at the local level such as in the case of the local Agent at Ipswich who arranged a Special Train to Kensington (Olympia) for the January Sales - and the train was packed. Yet all the railways seem to be able to suggest is to go to the traveller's normal London Terminus and then "make your own way".

The Commission's relations with Travel Agents was also very poor, and in this connection the Chairman, who could speak with inside experience, since he is engaged full time in the travel trade, stated that the Commission regarded agents as a nuisance and did not seem to want them, unlike airline companies which were only too pleased to take representatives of agencies to inspect their latest aircraft in order to gain publicity and trade. The number of railway tickets sold through agencies was more than might be imagined, and the amount of business that would be obtained for the railways if closer co-operation existed could be quite considerable. The special train already referred to is a case in point.

The Chairman then went on to outline the effect the Society had had on slowing down the closure of lines. Although no specific reprieves could be attributed to the Society's efforts, it could not be denied that the Transport Users Consultative Committees were now less ready to endorse the Commission's proposals for closures than they used to be. It has also been noticed that the Commission itself is thinking again regarding many lines that a year or so ago would have been proposed for closure. One case where the T.U.C.C. had asked the Commission to think again was the Penrith - Barnard Castle Line, where the Commission were asked to keep the route open for a further 18 months during which it is expected to find other ways of reducing this route's alleged annual loss of £103,000. SRUBLUK cannot think that the T.U.C.C. would have made such a request three years ago. Another route is the Alton - Ealtwistle Line, where the matter has been referred back for further consultations with the local Council. Another line is that from Buckingham - Banbury, which is still running, and the recent history of this line was related. This route was also the subject of a Reinvigoration Party, recently.

Ways of strengthening SRUBLUK were next discussed, and ideas for getting more members were invited. Members were again asked to send any press cuttings as soon as possible that might be of interest to the Committee, as their authors (in the case of letters) might also be potential members. Mention was also made of the proposed Reinvigoration Party to visit three branches in Kent which are at present tottering on the threshold of closure, fuller details of which will follow. It is hoped to run this KENT REINVIGORATION PARTY in the Autumn, on September 11th.

The Chairman also outlined the part Branch Lines could play in connecting with air traffic - the Silver Arrow service from London (Victoria) to Margate (for Manston) was cited as an example, also the statement by the Chairman of B.O.A.C. regarding the imperative need for a rail connection to London Airport. The Chairman stated that Air Terminals should be at or near stations - such as in Brussels, where there is a rail service to the City Centre, or as in Switzerland where the coach from the airport terminates outside the town's main station.

The general attitude to railways was then discussed, and also the problems of rural transport; he referred to a visit he paid recently to Athens where in response to a question an official of the Hellenic State Railways when asked whether the Greek Railways paid, said - "do any railways pay" and stated that in Greece, as in many other countries the railways were looked upon as a national asset and a public service. We have not yet heard of the British Government proposing to "make the roads pay"! However, the general attitude that the railways here should be made to pay, rather than a subsidy be paid is now changing; and in the face of the possibility of the people in rural areas being left stranded if their transport cannot be run and thereby is withdrawn, because it is losing is causing this volte-face. The Chairman quoted an interesting correspondence he had with a leading columnist of the Sunday Times on this topic.

The Chairman then referred to a number of ways of improving the profitability of branch lines, in addition to those mentioned in the SRUBLUK Manifesto. Experience shewed that many branch lines were grossly overstaffed, especially at terminal stations; a typical example of which is Lambourn. Another typical example is Westerham where just recently a staff of five was counted on a Sunday afternoon. If diesels were used, were ^{two} three persons needed to run the train,

could not the driver act as a conductor also, and thus do away with the need for a guard and fireman? Certain legal problems might arise in this connection, and there might be objections from the Trade Unions, but it was an idea. In view of the fact that Branch Lines were much less dangerous than roads, could not duly signposted gateless level-crossings be used, as had been done in a number of cases in Scotland?

The Chairman then mentioned the co-operation which existed with other Railway Societies such as the Railway Development Association with whom we were in regular contact, so that there was no duplication of effort on specific matters; also with the Branch Line Society and the various Railway Preservation Societies.

Mention was also made of the fact that road development was way behind in relation to the increase in traffic and that the Railways could (and should) do more to encourage traffic in order to ease road congestion. If the millions spent on roads were spent on improving the railways and was more money was made available to the Commission by the Government to speed up modernisation, it would be to much greater advantage than the present policy.

Striking a more cheerful note, the Chairman referred to the re-opening of a branch line that had been closed to passenger traffic for some 40 years - namely the five mile branch from Lower Edmonton to Southbury, Turkey Street, and Theobalds Grove to ~~Bedford Town~~ and Chesham.

The Chairman then asked for questions and comments from the meeting. Mr. Freeman asked what further had transpired in connection with the proposal that the Commission should purchase an interest in Silver City Airways. It was understood that although the offer was still open, it had been shelved at the request of the Minister of Transport who had refused his consent. Mr. Judd suggested that the reason for the Minister's action was probably that if sanction had been granted at this time when the Channel Tunnel Report was just about to come out, it would appear that the latter matter had been pre-judged.

Mr. Morris (a new member) mentioned a new reason why he thought that the Buckingham - Banbury was still running was because he had heard that Brackley Council had asked the Minister for permission to run the branch privately if the line closed, for the benefit of the inhabitants. The Chairman in reply stated that he had heard from the Council, and from the Commission, that the Council had now abandoned this project. Mr. Morris was of the opinion that there was a need for more publicity for the Society and mentioned the state of affairs

which existed in Los Angeles where, after spending millions on improving the roads which were nevertheless still choked with traffic, the City Fathers had come to the conclusion that the only way to solve the problem was to modernise the railway system; it was publicity such as this, that was needed. He also suggested that the Progress Report might also be advertised for sale to the Public generally and that it should be larger and issued less frequently. Mr. Judd in reply, whilst agreeing with the general idea, stated that a referendum had shewn that the members preferred it to be smaller and more often. Mr. Morris also suggested that a small advertisement might be inserted in various railway magazines to attract members and that anyone interested could purchase copies of the Progress Reports for (say) 6d each. Mr. Postgate, however, considered it should be free. Another suggestion was a descriptive publication of particular branches in the news - e.g. Buckingham - Banbury. The Committee felt however that this was more properly the province of the Branch Lines Society, and might be tantamount to poaching, although their material was more of historical interest, and we might be able to cover more general points.

HON. TREASURER'S REPORT. The report and accounts are attached, and Mr. Postgate stated that he had little to add to it; the adoption of the accounts together with a vote of thanks to the Treasurer was proposed by Mr. Judd and seconded by Mr. Chilton.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT. The membership position was quite encouraging; only 11 members have not renewed so far this year, compared with 38 in 1959 and 75 in 1958, at the time of the slump in the Society's activities. This year, however, 11 new members have joined so far, which neatly balances the losses. In addition, 5 lapsed members have re-joined. Mr. Judd then spoke regarding the annual letter that many members send to him when forwarding their subscriptions. Whilst not disapproving of the practice, as these letters frequently contained news of use to the Committee regarding Branch Lines, he hoped members would send in the news as soon as they heard it, and not wait for their annual letter around January or February each year.

In his capacity of Editor, Mr. Judd then referred to the Progress Report, which is now being issued more frequently as promised at the last Annual General Meeting; mostly in winter, and every month or two in the summer. The size varied with the news available, but it was felt by the Committee that it was better to issue a small Report than none at all. This side of the report, giving news of lines, had been expanded; as opposed to news of the work of the

Society, but he had adopted as a principle not to poach news from other Societies' publications, and relied on that received directly by the Committee and from members. In this matter the Committee had plans for further extending the news service and it was hoped to make a start in the next month or two. (It may now be announced that starting with the June issue there will be a much greater news coverage now that we have extended our sources of news).

Copies of the Progress Report were sent to other Societies such as the Bluebell Railway Preservation Society and the Midland and Great Northern Joint Railway Preservation Society in return for copies of their magazines; and announcements of Society events were also exchanged. Members were reminded once again to bring in new members and also encourage any lapsed members that they knew to rejoin; since the Society is now far more active. Members who are prepared to take an active part in the Society's work are particularly welcome since the Society is restricted more by shortage of manpower than shortage of funds.

Mr. Judd then mentioned two points that had been raised in recent letters for members consideration -

(a) Mr. Mark Wright of Sunderland, one of our active members writes to say - "that the Society in my view should be changed. I believe the future of branch secondary lines lies in private enterprise of the nature of the Railway Preservation Societies and there is a reasonable hope that at least a short section of the M & GN will be re-opened before long, quite possibly this year. My personal feeling, and I am stating it now as I will not be able to attend the General Meeting, is that to attempt to stop what looks like being a major shut-down of all but main lines under the Government's new policy would be useless and pointless. The future role of STURLUK as I see it would be as the co-ordinating factor of the various schemes for private enterprise on railways with which the Society is already associated and the encouragement of others to follow in the footsteps of those who have begun. I envisage a concern under such a name as Independent Transport Ltd. which would control or advise and be in association with the various private enterprise schemes throughout the country. As soon as one of the schemes succeeds I feel that that will be the signal for many others to follow suit and that under a central

advisory body, which SRUBLUK could turn into, success on a wide scale would be more likely."

Members are asked to consider this carefully, and at the end of this circular is a form for registering your opinion on this matter. All members are urged to complete the form, and to send it to the Chairman to be received by him by 15 June. All members who do not reply will be assumed to be in favour of no change being made in the policy of SRUBLUK.

The Meeting agreed that all members views on Mr. Mark Wright's proposal should be obtained.

Mr. Judd then said that Mr. Neville of Dundee proposed that the date of the Annual General Meeting be announced more in advance so that members could make better arrangements to attend. It was agreed that the date of the A.G.M. would be notified in the January Circular, or if possible, that of December.

ELECTION OF NEW COMMITTEE. The new Committee (as listed on the front page) was elected; Mr. Watt and Mr. Kendon are no longer co-opted members, as they are now abroad. The appointment of Membership Secretary will be filled at the subsequent committee meeting, and will be notified to the members in the following circular. It will be one of the committee listed on the front page, and there are at present three nominations for the office.

In a letter from Mr. B.R. Cockburn, of 11 High View, Wallsend, Northumberland, he puts forward some startling suggestions, with no doubt will be of interest to other members; he also gives news of lines in the North-East as seen by him:-

"I visited the Alston Branch which has been given a reprieve. There is a new service operated by a diesel unit. I have worked out that the branch could save money by cutting railway staff at Slaggyford, gatekeeper, Lambley, porter-signalman, Featherstone Park, gatekeeper. A new system could be introduced at the road crossings at Slaggyford and Featherstone Park. There is not much point of a porter signalman at Lambley. In my opinion the fares should be lowered at least 70 (!) %.

Another branch that I visited in the recent past was the 3 mile Alnmouth to Alnwick branch. This branch is in my opinion safe as houses. There are 13 and 14 trains on SX and SO respectively each way. The Duke of Northumberland lives at Alnwick and this will also help if it is proposed to close. There are four trains that run through to Newcastle and vice-versa. (The presence of Blenheim Palace and the Duke of Marlborough did not stop the Blenheim branch

from closing - Ed.).

Another branch in the North East under the axe is the Barnard Castle - Penrith branch. It has been proposed to close this branch. The Barnard Castle - Middleton-in-Teesdale is also in danger of closure. If the Barnard Castle - Penrith branch is closed the line restored as a standby. Freight services will probably still operate"

The above letter is the kind that is valuable to the Committee, and it is hoped that it will encourage others to keep the Committee informed regarding the position on their local lines.

We are sorry that this copy of the Report has appeared late, but it was desired to await the full list of the new Committee, and also the full report of the Annual General Meeting, which had to be ratified at the following Committee meeting. The June Report will, however, follow early next month, to make up for this late appearance, and members will find an extension of our news service regarding news of branch lines which will in future be much expanded.

Do not forget to complete the form below in connection with Mr. Mark Wright's letter - see page 7 of the report.

Chairman - Mr. G.F.Marley, 42 Hillsborough Court, London, N.W.6.
Editor - 68, Mayfield Avenue, Crpington, Kent.

To the Chairman, SRUEBLUK,
42 Hillsborough Court,
London, N.W.6.

I wish to support Mr. Mark Wright's suggestion.

I am against the suggestion made by Mr. Mark Wright, and wish SRUEBLUK's aims to be left undisturbed.

Additional remarks.....

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NAME (IN CAPITALS).....

ADDRESS.....

(Date).....

SRUBLUK

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

The Branch Line Reinvigoration Society

ANNUAL ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 DECEMBER, 1959.

PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT.

Hire of Hall	1: 5: 6	Donations	12: 7: 9
Postages	13:10: 3	Subscriptions 1959	45:17: -
Printing and Circulars	48:16: 9	Subscriptions 1958	1: 7:10
Sundries	2: 8: 8	Sale of Cards	2: 5: 2
			<u>61:17: 8</u>
		Excess of Expenditure over Income	4: 2:11
	<u>66: -: 8</u>		<u>66: -: 8</u>

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER, 1959.

Received in Advance		Stock of Cards	10: -
Subscriptions	3: 9: -	Cash in Hand	2: 5: 2
Donations	<u>10: 6</u>	Cash in Bank	29:12:11
General Account -		Paid in advance -	
Balance from		Hall Expenses	3:17: 6
Last Year -	36: 9: -		
Less from above -	<u>4: 2:11</u>		
	32: 6: 1		
	<u>36: 5: 7</u>		<u>36: 5: 7</u>

30 April, 1960.

F.E. POSTGATE,
Hon. Treasurer, SRUBLUK.

The Hon. Treasurer's Report appears overleaf.

HONORARY TREASURER'S REPORT.

As I foreshadowed in my report last year, the transactions of this year show an excess of expenditure over income.

In this year our stationery fell due for renewal, and our manifesto had to be revised and reprinted. These items will not recur for some time.

As before, an estimate has been made of the postages and other expenses incurred by members of the Committee and which they have not claimed. This has been treated as part of the expense of the Society on the one hand, in order that the real cost of running the Society should be apparent in the accounts, and also as a donation on the other side.

30 April, 1960.

P.E. Postgate,
Hon. Treasurer, SRUBLUK.

The Annual Accounts appear overleaf.