

# 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 - APRIL, 1960.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING. The Annual General Meeting will take place on 30 April, 1960. A copy of the Agenda is enclosed. WILL EVERYONE DO THEIR BEST TO ATTEND.

THAT BROKEN RAIL. Members will remember the report in the last issue regarding the length of rail that had been lifted on the Alyth Jct. - Ardler - Dundee Line. The following explanation has now been received over the personal signature of the Chief Operating Superintendent, Scottish Region:-

"By making a physical break in the  $4\frac{1}{4}$  mile section at the Newtyle and Auchterhouse ends of this branch line from which passenger train services have been withdrawn, we have been able to effect immediate economies as follows:-

- (a) The Chief Civil Engineer has  $4\frac{1}{4}$  miles less of track to maintain;
- (b) The Operating Department can introduce "one engine in steam" working and get rid of token working requiring the presence of signalling staff;

consequently I have no doubt that your knowledgeable members will know that this is standard Operating procedure (sic!) and that one engine in steam working could not be introduced until there was a physical break. Far from being a cost cut, it is aimed towards further reducing freight working costs on this branch".

This of course is all very interesting. But it was indeed curious that the operation has reduced freight working costs on this branch by making physical breaks at both ends; it is difficult to see how the freight service is maintained to the intervening stations. Moreover, mention is made of a break not only at the Newtyle end, but also at the Auchterhouse end of the branch; Auchterhouse is the next station to Newtyle, and is separated from the other end of the branch by no less than five stations! We hope that the Chief Operating Superintendent will be kind enough to explain this curious anomaly, and we would be pleased to publish his explanation.

THE MOOMIN-VALLEY RAILWAY. Construction of the Moomin-Valley Railway commenced on 31 March, and owing to the use of a spiked road, construction is proceeding rapidly. Where the Railway will end, and whether any trains will ever run on it, is anyone's guess. In case this all seems rather mysterious, we had better explain that a cartoon appears daily in the London Evening News featuring an aimable character called Moomin, and that on 31 March a new series started under the above title. Although rather outside our terms of reference, we feel the members might like to follow it, as it is bound to be a very individual line!

Mr. Thomas of Ipplepen, Devon, advises us that on a line in his area the service is going to be withdrawn, and this will affect the transport of schoolchildren. In consequence of this, the Council will have to provide special buses, at £5000 apiece, to transport the children. He suggests that the B.T.C. should be asked to contribute at least half the cost of the special transport. SRUBLUK feels that if the Council made a grant to British Railways to enable them to continue the service, it would not cost any more than providing these new coaches .....

Penrith - Barnard Castle(The Pennine Route) is threatened with closure, and SRUBLUK are studying the line, although the prospect is not very hopeful.

The Guillebaud Report and its effect on the Branch Line Problem was considered at the last meeting of your Committee, and it is hoped to make a statement (which may form the basis of a debate) at the Annual General Meeting. It was felt that the suggestion that we should not campaign in respect of particular lines, should not be accepted; two recent instances where the authorities heeded our views are the Buckingham to Banbury (Merton Street) and the Alton - Haltwistle branches. It is quite clear that both the B.T.C. and the appropriate T.U.C.C.'s watch their step more carefully now when dealing with the closing of branches.

Some members will have noticed that they have new style Membership Cards, the validity of which is indicated by punch holes. They are smaller, neater, and more convenient; those members who earlier this year were issued with the old (large) type are still members in good standing, however. This advice is given in case members compare cards at the A.G.M. and wonder why they differ.

The Committee were advised that Mr. G.R. Hooper will have to give up his duties as Minutes Secretary and we would be pleased to hear from any member who would take this on. Mr. Hooper has carried out these duties excellently for a long time, but unfortunately he now has to relinquish this post, for private reasons. After the forthcoming Annual General Meeting Mr. K.G. Judd will also have to vacate the appointment of Membership Secretary, which was announced a full twelve months ago; he will be continuing as Editor of the Progress Report, however.

The Society have also sustained another loss; for some years the Committee meetings have taken place at the Crescent Cafe, Half Moon Crescent, London, N.1, by kind permission of Mr. George Betton, the proprietor. Shortly before the last Committee meeting, he was admitted to hospital, and died a few days later. This was a great shock to the members of the Committee, and the late Mr. Betton had contributed to a considerable degree to the funds of the Society by not making any charge for the many Committee meetings that took place in his cafe. We will miss him, and express our condolences to his family.

THE BUDGET. As many of us expected, the Budget was not one of sweeping changes, but this time there was one item of interest to members of SRUBLUK, that they may like to ponder over. It was the part of the Chancellor's speech regarding the finances of the British Transport Commission. He said:- "...The deficits of the Commission have, since the passing of the Transport (Railway Finances) Act 1957, been financed by advances from the Exchequer. These have been on the basis that the Commission would eventually make profits out of which it could pay interest on the advances and repay the capital, ... It has become apparent that the prospects of the railways and the Commission are not now such as to justify the continued financing of the deficit by repayable advances..... For the purposes of my Budget calculations I am accordingly transferring £90 million from below the line to above the line. The effect of this is that the amount of the deficit will have to be met from revenue, a sharp reminder of the harsh realities of a disturbing situation...." This is most important. For the benefit of our members who

are not at home with the Chancellor's phraseology, it means that hitherto the Government has been lending money to the Transport Commission, on which interest was payable, and the money borrowed was due to be repaid in due course, but that owing to the financial position of the railways, they found themselves unable so far to repay these loans; they also found themselves unable to pay the interest,

so they borrowed further money from the Chancellor to pay the interest! At long last the Government has realised that this is a foolish situation, and in future, the money placed at the disposal of the Commission will not be regarded as a loan, but will be a direct charge on Taxation. In the Chancellor's speech, revenue means Government Revenue, not railway revenue. So it is now admitted - in very Parliamentary language - that the Government has now accepted the case of a subsidy for the railways. Members of SRUBLUK can see in this hope that as the railways are now being made a revenue charge, an end to the legal subterfuge, that the railways are to be treated solely as a commercial profit earning enterprise, and more like the roads and rivers, which no-one seriously expects to be run on a private enterprise basis since they are also public transport services.

We will leave you with those thoughts to mull over before the Annual General Meeting, and hope that you will have some interesting points to make then.

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