

It has always appealed to me that all too many of our people have been satisfied to conclude that the present state of the railway industry has been due wholly and solely to some defect in the railways. I cannot help but feel surprised that one fact (which seems obvious on a reasonably close examination of the situation) has not been more fully recognized—namely, that the introduction of the road motor into transport, and development to such a large extent on an uneconomic basis, has been at the bottom of a part of the trouble. Just as obvious is it that the motor has come in as a valuable addition to the transport facilities of the country, and I feel that if anything can be done along the lines of bringing each method of transport into its true economic sphere something will have been accomplished for the country. Thinking along these lines, it was my intention—as I announced in the course of the recent election campaign—to have called a conference of representatives of the various transport interests.

I think this is the method likely to be most fruitful in arriving at a solution of our present transport difficulty. The magnitude of that difficulty and its potentiality for further growth if the situation is not soon faced must give very grave cause for thought to any one that has the welfare of our Dominion at heart.

In some other countries action has already been taken by legislative regulation of transport services in order to eliminate waste and secure the efficiency that can only be obtained from a thorough-going co-operation and co-ordination. Whether that is the best way of achieving that end in this country is a matter on which there might be some difference of opinion, but I certainly think that the first step towards a solution is to get rid of the feeling of antagonism among the various transport interests, and bring together in friendly discussion those who, by actually working in the industry, have learned to know most about its difficulties.

The whole question is one essentially calling for calm consideration unaffected by motives of prejudice or interest. The early stages of such a radical change as was effected by the rapid development of road transport were certainly not conducive to such a frame of mind.

I have for some years past made mention of my desire to work towards a position where we could have free, frank, and helpful discussion at such a conference as I propose, and I feel that the realization which most thoughtful people in the country are coming to of the necessity for something definite being done to solve our transport problem makes the time ripe for a definite step along the lines I have indicated.

CONCLUSION.

I claim that the foregoing summary shows my administration of the Railways Department to have been along sound lines, making for progress in quality of service, efficiency in action, and economy in operation.

As regards the staff, I have endeavoured—with, I think, success—to treat them fairly and, as opportunity offered, to improve their lot not only in the matter of remuneration, but also as regards their conditions of work and the facilities that make for their comfort and safety.

As far as the public is concerned, I have aimed to give a standard of service that would be to their satisfaction, while avoiding unnecessary expenditure.

The advantages of many of the proposals that I have adopted will not be fully felt for some time, but I am confident that when they come to a full measure of fruition it will be found that there is not one of the works authorized during my regime that was not amply justified or that any wise administration could have avoided.

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