

4. ROAD SAFETY.

A. PUBLICITY, PROPAGANDA, AND ADULT EDUCATION.

The importance of publicity and propaganda in traffic-accident prevention is now recognized throughout the world.

The recent report of the House of Lords Committee on Road Reform Proposals states as follows :—

“ Witnesses were unanimous in affirming that an extensive and persistent campaign of educational propaganda should be undertaken and that it should be aimed at every class of road-user.”

The Committee agreed that this is required.

The House of Lords Committee recommended that :—

“ A Department of Propaganda should be formed, employing commercial experts, and the Treasury should make an early and substantial grant for the purpose. Co-operation from the pulpit and cinemas should be sought. Broadcasting, signs, advertisement posters, pamphlets, and lectures, &c., should also be employed. Methods adopted by the Post Office and the National Campaign for Fitness might be followed. Young children should be grounded at home in good road behaviour, and instruction in road safety should form part of the school curriculum.”

A road safety committee presided over by the Lord Mayor of Melbourne recently recommended the intensive education of the public of Melbourne in road-safety principles at a cost, for the first year, of £20,000 to £30,000. Publicity and propaganda are utilized on an extensive scale in accident-prevention in the United States.

As a result of the experience during the year it is the Department's considered opinion that a regular programme of publicity is a necessary part of an adequate road-safety campaign. To illustrate this, the following are of interest :—

It was anticipated that political meetings throughout the country prior to the elections would greatly increase the possibility of accidents, particularly to pedestrians. A special road-safety effort was made and, despite large crowds, nearly twenty days passed without a fatality on the roads. As far as is known, upon a population and car registration basis this constitutes a world's record.

Early in December another special effort was made in the organization of a Road Safety Week to bring to the notice of the public the danger of taking risks in Christmas and New Year holiday traffic. During the ten weeks following the commencement of the week, despite an increase of 25,000 cars on the road, there were forty-one traffic fatalities, as against fifty-eight for the corresponding period of the previous year. Road Safety Week had two effects: It brought about a reduction in accidents immediately following the effort, and it had the long-range effect of making the public mind more susceptible to road-safety propaganda in the future.

Another example of the value of publicity was shown by a special campaign among motor-cyclists. This was followed by a period of three months in which there were four fatal accidents, compared with eighteen during the same three months of the previous year.

During the year under review many different types of publicity and propaganda methods were used for road safety educational purposes by this Department. These included the radio, press, posters, leaflets, competitions, screen slides, good-riding awards, and personal addresses.

Accident statistics were utilized to the fullest extent not only in press statements, radio propaganda, leaflets, &c., but in planning the direction of the road-safety educational campaign. For instance, statistics indicated that May and June might be expected to be the worst months in the year for accidents to cyclists, and, accordingly, during these months publicity was directed towards the prevention of cycle accidents.

Assistance is acknowledged from the press, the National and Commercial Broadcasting Services, the Post and Telegraph and other Government Departments, local bodies, and the many business firms, organizations, and private individuals that have submitted suggestions and offered active assistance during the year.

The following were the main publicity activities during the year :—

Press.—The willing assistance of the press in the publication of road-safety material provided much valuable publicity. Statements summarizing accident statistics and announcing new developments in the work of the Department have been issued at intervals to the newspapers. Ministerial appeals for special care on particular occasions have also been published. Liberal space has been given to leading articles on topics of road safety. Meetings of the Road Safety Council and meetings of motor-cyclists throughout the country have been reported fully. During Road Safety Week several newspapers printed special safety editions.

Posters and Posterettes. Fourteen slogan and two pictorial posters were printed and distributed during the year. A poster competition was held in connection with Road Safety Week.