

NATIONAL UNION OF RAILWAYMEN

The Mis-shaping of British Railways

PART 1: RETORT

London

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RESHAPING OF BRITISH RAILWAYS

Bristling with statements and figures that cannot be checked; cemented with academic argument and polished by much skilled handling, the formidable Beeching Report survived its launching with seeming success.

But the public were not deceived. Now the document has been read and assessed they have made it quite clear that not only do they regard it with disfavour, but that it is far from being watertight.

Indeed, the Tory Press have measured public opinion as being FIVE-TO-ONE AGAINST.

SHAKY FOUNDATIONS

Quite apart from the misguided brief under which Dr. Beeching operated, we hold the view that there are fundamental weaknesses in the Plan itself.

Its conclusions are founded on traffic studies based on a single week's workings. This gives only a one in fifty-two chance of the figures being truly representative.

We recall that a 12-year-old schoolboy faulted some of the published information. An error of 20,000 tons weekly was found respecting a small section of line. It altered the picture completely. Who knows how many other errors went undetected?

Much of the Report is based on assumptions which it has been freely admitted **may prove to be wrong by experience**. For example, the total estimated saving is about £140 million annually, but of this sum only £40 million or less is from direct saving. The other £100 million is mere guesswork.

The whole concept of the Plan is open to question. It blames the Railways Working Account deficit on to unremunerative branch lines, stopping trains, short-haul parcel traffic, etc., but the facts do not bear this out.

All these things existed during 1947-1952 when the Railways paid their way—and they were no more profitable then than they are today. The real reason for the deficit was the sharp decline in mineral traffic, i.e., coal, iron, steel, etc.

It is said that the proposed Liner Trains will be planned with the Channel Tunnel in mind. How specific are the plans for this tunnel? When will it be completed? Will it be rendered obsolete by the improved 100 m.p.h. Hovercraft? This sounds like another Common Market fiasco. Is it right that the welfare and transport prospects of the nation should be built on half-baked ideas?

THE OBVIOUS REMEDY

The Report itself admits that the Railways paid their way from 1947 to 1952. But it conveniently **OMITS** to mention that this was during the period of transport integration installed by the Labour Government. It worked. It paid. It proved an unqualified success.

There was no need for the Government to introduce Dr. Beeching and his very highly-paid army of ex-industrial supporters. **A proven remedy was at hand—and still is.**

The financial rot set in **ONLY AFTER** the Tory Government denationalised road haulage.

DISREGARD OF SOCIAL NEEDS AND CONSEQUENCES

Implementation of the Plan will leave vast areas of the British Isles without any railways at all. These approximations give some idea:—

5,000 sq. miles in N. and N.W. Scotland.

3,600 sq. miles in N.E. Scotland.

1,600 sq. miles immediately North of Glasgow starting almost from the suburban boundaries.

3,500 sq. miles in S. Wales.

2,100 sq. miles in N. Wales.

3,100 sq. miles in N. England.

1,000 sq. miles in the County of Lincolnshire.

This rape of the railways will benefit private road hauliers and bus companies; it will enrich the petrol, oil and motor-car magnates, and it will profit the land speculators and road builders, etc. They are poised for their pickings.

But it will punish the aged, the infirm and the poorer people who cannot afford to run a car.

Buses are no substitute for trains, especially in rural areas.³ They have no real capacity for packages, parcels, livestock, etc. They wind slowly from village to village, doubling time, mileage and fares. They are victims of bad weather and their capacity is strictly limited.

Closures in known areas of unemployment will throw more people on to the open labour market—and the dole. This in turn will force people into the already congested urban areas.

Dr. Beeching's Report says that if the proposals are implemented in full, then the staff, the public and industry will suffer. Minister Marples knows this but still insists on full implementation.

He maintains that the sufferings and hardships imposed on thousands of people; the disturbance of their ways of life; the shattering of their plans and also the abrupt cessation of traditional transport services to hundreds of towns and villages ARE ALL OF LESS CONSEQUENCE THAN A PAPER PROFIT.

The Plan is wrong in concept and intentions. It is not in the best interests of the General Public.

OPPOSE IT. SPEAK AGAINST IT. VOTE AGAINST IT. PROTEST TO YOUR LOCAL AND NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS. URGE YOUR M.P. TO TAKE POSITIVE ACTION AGAINST IT.

REMEMBER, THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE MUST PREVAIL.