

# Editorial Comment

## *Water-Power, Railroads and Electrification—The Government's Part*

**D**URING the war the necessities of both industrial interests and the government are causing a greater degree of co-operation among the railroads than has ever existed before. The results must be permanently beneficial. The effect of such co-operation is, in reality, to truly "nationalize" the whole great transportation system, not by bringing it under public ownership, but in making the railroads a working unit for the efficient service of the country.

The government itself, however, must learn to co-operate with the railroads not only in matters pertaining directly to the movement of freight, but also in affording them proper facilities for operation. One of the principal opportunities in this respect is to be found in opening up the water powers of the country for the use of railroads and industrial enterprises wherever such development is feasible. Among the most interesting and instructive examples of what can be accomplished has been demonstrated in the electrification of certain mountain divisions of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway on its Puget Sound extension. This has made a remarkable showing in eliminating the use of coal and other supplies connected with steam locomotive operation; in cars released on this account; man power released, not only by reason of the saving in coal and its transportation, but also in the abandonment of water stations and their pumping plants; the difference in maintenance charges between the two types of locomotives, including all fuel, pumping and other plants required exclusively in steam operation; the saving resulting from the handling of longer trains, which reduces the cost for labor, etc., per car-mile, and other very material economies disclosed by experienced investigators. In fact, present conditions along the Montana-Idaho divisions of this railroad and those adjacent to them affected by the same situation prove a strong argument for the early development of water power for similar purposes in all parts of the country.

Another related phase of the same subject is the advantage to be gained from electrification of terminals. Now that the railroads are learning to operate more and more nearly in unison, the serious defects in present terminal facilities for handling rolling stock and traffic are made manifest. The congestion of freight from which the country suffers so greatly results in large part from the inadequate equipment for handling rail traffic in the great mid-West, Appalachian and tidewater centers. J. H. Leonard, editor

of "Freight Handling and Terminal Engineering," asserts that steam-operated terminal service is perhaps the costliest feature of general railroad work. When it is realized that the cost of handling a ton of freight at terminals, particularly in the East, is greater than the cost of the haul from Chicago to New York, the conclusion is irresistible that something is basically wrong.

In urging the railroads to shake off the lethargy which prevents them from modernizing and improving their costly and inefficient freight-handling devices and their disjointed terminal facilities, Mr. Leonard writes: "The railroads of the United States are today handling freight by the same primitive methods that obtained 40 years ago. The result is excessive costs, inefficiency and crudeness in operation. The railroads have made wonderful progress in mechanical equipment, passenger comforts and other facilities, but in the handling of freight, particularly at terminals, they are behind every other civilized country in the world."

Mr. Leonard is probably a little more severe on the railroads than the situation really justifies, but there is enough truth in what he says to make business men urge them to "Stop, Look and Listen," to avoid the government ownership juggernaut.

The chief trouble heretofore has been that each railroad has looked upon the terminal problem from the point of view established by its selfish individual interests. Yet this problem, including economies to be brought about by gradual electrification, can be solved properly in any community only by the co-operation with the community as a whole of all the railroads directly affected. The coming together of the various railroads FOR CO-OPERATIVE SERVICE IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION at this critical time should prepare the way for radical improvement of the terminals in the freight centers, and also for more intelligent co-operative treatment by the government, by the railroads and by business interests of the general power problem in all its applications.

The great need is for that broad vision which, in contemplating the possibilities of the future, comprehends its every need.

## *Watch the Boiler Room This Fall*

**I**T is perhaps unnecessary to urge central-station managers to watch their boiler plants this fall with coal at current prices, but a word is not out of place surely regarding the wisdom of planning now to get the utmost service feasible out of the steam end of the station. Only a fortnight or so ago a central station in a well managed group of properties had to