

'The problem of European transport', from Revue d'économie politique (December 1951)

Caption: In December 1951, the Revue d'économie politique publishes an article by the Frenchman, Raoul Dautry, former Managing Director of the French State Railways, in which he advocates the reorganisation of European transport.

Source: Revue d'économie politique. novembre-décembre 1951. Paris: Dalloz-Sirey. "Le problème des transports européens", auteur:Dautry, Raoul , p. 893-898.

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Last updated: 06/07/2016

The problem of European transport

[...]

There is a transport crisis at both national and international level, the causes of which result from its very development. While nations, both on the scale of an economically integrated continent as in the United States, and on a small scale as in Europe, have been unable to harmonise their transport systems and coordinate and adapt them to the needs of the people, Europe, on the other hand, is on the road to establishing its union's first economic bodies and must therefore take into account the American experience and its individual national experiences before attempting to solve the issue of transport on its own scale. That is to say, it must be wary of the idea that a simple pooling of its main transport systems will put an end to their inflationary upsurge, the competition with each other that they create and the deficits they generate. It is, therefore, advisable to take on only those 'European' initiatives whose aim is improvement and the promotion of greater efficiency within the transport systems, which are divided into their respective areas of operation, and to rule out all those which, in the end, serve only to transfer national difficulties to the European level.

As such, there is no harm in conceiving of a European road network or in creating a contract for the international carriage of goods by road — for which the Drafting Committee recently held its sixth session in Germany — as long as these projects do not aim to strengthen at European level the road-rail competition which exists at national level.

The German–Dutch Chamber of Commerce which met this past April in Hamburg, in the presence of the Mayors of Rotterdam and Hamburg, proposed a union of German and Benelux ports. This is a very interesting proposition if it eliminates traditional competition between the Baltic and the North Sea ports. However, it would be dangerous if it aimed only to ally interests as a means to defend them more effectively vis-à-vis others.

Although cooperation among European airlines (for example, Sabena and KLM, which provide night services between Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, Copenhagen and Stockholm; for example, the Scandinavian Air Lines System, which combines three airlines: Swedish, Danish and Norwegian; or the cooperation recently recommended by the President of Air France among all European airlines) is an excellent thing, since it results in the elimination of inter-airline competition, it might, however, fail to meet a truly European goal if it was undertaken in an attempt to compete with overland transport.

There are, however, other projects that anyone who supports the European cause — which is to arise out of our ruins, to improve our situation and to develop socially and culturally — cannot but encourage; for example, international agreements such as the one which the SNCF signed with German Railways for the joint use of 100 000 coaches and trucks. By restricting the number of journeys with no payload and by increasing rolling stock productivity, this agreement generates significant operating savings (as well as savings of 10 000 million francs in investment to be made for any 10 % increase in profit) at the same time as it constitutes an anti-inflationary measure and serves as an example of transport system cooperation that appeals to any other European administrations which wish to take part.

Similarly, the Mont Blanc Tunnel construction project, with an estimated construction cost of 6 400 million francs, is the type of project that will amply reimburse Europe's costs, for it will be the joint effort of two nations (ideally, it would have been undertaken by all of the Western nations, since they are all concerned, in the final analysis) to provide better facilities for the continent and to make immediate use of its labour force and its means of production, which are in surplus when the economy is not fuelled by national defence requirements. If it were supplemented by the construction of the two rail and road tunnels under the English Channel and the Straits of Gibraltar, the union of European nations would begin to be solidly cemented by opening itself up to cooperation with African agricultural and mining production and, in a massive joint undertaking, to the full employment of all European and African workers.

Similarly, the institution of a High Authority for Transport seems to me to be more urgent and more

beneficial than customs unions or currency agreements or even the heavy industry pool. For how will they eliminate the enormous investment and operational costs that transport creates within each one of the nations if Europe does not 'rethink' the problem completely? Transport could be one of the most powerful levers for the Europe of tomorrow, just as it could be its greatest burden.

What has been done in this respect? The Berne Conventions, as they are referred to, which replace the domestic laws of various countries with a special international law on rail transport; the technical unit regulation, which sets rolling stock standards for cross-border operations — measures that have been in place for many years; the International Union of Railways, which has been given a coordination and leadership role in recent years as well as the overall task of representing rail interests; the European Central Inland Transport Organisation created in 1945; the newly created Automobile Services Conference responsible for monitoring network construction involving international tourist transport by road; the various Inland Navigation Commissions established by what are sometimes antediluvian diplomatic acts; the International Association of Navigation Congresses, which handles inland waterway and maritime transport issues and involves 33 countries; the International Air Transport Association, which dates back to World War I; the non-governmental International Road Federation; the International Federation of Road Transporters, which unites the national federations of professional transporters: all of these measures and bodies constitute, of course, significant attempts to standardise equipment and coordinate activity, but their deliberately limited objectives prevent them from doing anything more and from tackling the fundamental problems.

That is why the proposal to create a European Transport Executive, which had been adopted by the Council of Europe's Special Committee on Transport at the meeting chaired by Mr Bonnefous in Paris on 9 February, immediately seemed as though it could successfully lead Europe towards better organisation and coordination of its transport systems; its powers were to encompass the various transport systems of the member countries, with the authority to make decisions on issues involving two or more member countries, and to make recommendations on any national problems relating to these issues. Its authority or influence would have thus allowed for the harmonious combination of individual efforts at all levels — local, national and European — by avoiding costly and unproductive investment and encouraging sound facilities for the common good.

'Europeans' should thus consider it a shame that the proposal was not discussed by the Strasbourg Assembly, as set out in the agenda for its third session this year.

True, the issue was referred back to the Assembly's Committee on Economic Affairs at the July session chaired by Mr Paul Reynaud in Paris. However, although a new agreement of principle was reached on the text finalised by Mr Bonnefous, the very idea of creating a European transport authority was dropped. The support given to the creation of a body that would act as an advisory institute or bureau is not satisfactory, especially since air transport, on a proposal adopted by Mr Van de Kieft, will be the subject of separate proposals, which seems quite remarkable within the context of efforts that must aim to eliminate competition between various means of transport and allocate their activities more efficiently.

For, in the end, wanting to create Europe is good; or at least, it was good yesterday. Today, we must actively and rapidly set about its organisation. Indeed, the farsighted and improved organisation of the lives of Europeans can be founded only on the improved organisation of rail, road, sea and air transport, which, in the 19th and 20th centuries, helped the world progress towards its highest economic, social and cultural expression, but which, for the last 30 years, have jeopardised such stability as a result of their uncoordinated development.

European unification must be carefully planned and carried out in stages, since any hasty approach would foster individualistic tendencies. That is why I remain a proponent of what is known as the 'operational' approach, one which is based on the existence of solid national interests and recognises that those interests must come second to the general good and which simply suggests that the countries of Western Europe must, in the wise words of the Netherlands Foreign Minister, Mr Stikker, 'begin immediately to cooperate wherever they can', and successfully establish kinds of federations, limited not in terms of geography, but in

terms of their operation. What better 'operational' federation could Europe attempt to create, and with such scope for success, than a transport federation? Is it not clear that the various organisations already in place demonstrate that the area of transport lends itself to immediate and effective action?

In a recent article in the *Revue de la société belge d'études et d'expansion*, Emile Bernheim stressed that the public is poorly informed about transport problems and about the impact of such problems on the economy and the politics of European nations, while their interests lie in such futile pursuits as cinema or sport. A dynamic campaign must be launched to make Europe aware of the scale and of the gravity of this extremely serious situation, to show Europe that, whereas a few enlightened men, such as the followers of Saint-Simonianism during the previous century, were able to draw up a sound transport policy in keeping with the progress of the human condition, neither parliaments nor governments have been able, to date, to reach agreement on its implementation. Therefore, we must go back to basics, look carefully at the facts and confront them in their true context and their resistance. Persistent and far-reaching action must be taken in order to enlighten the young people who will be the European leaders of tomorrow, the heads of companies who must have a clear idea of which initiatives are capable of improving the human condition, and the workers themselves, as they have most to gain from improvements in their material and ethical standard of living.

Europe needs borders that are open to the free movement of ideas, goods and persons. It needs to exploit its resources more efficiently, to employ its labour force more effectively. But how can this freedom be ensured when ideas stumble, housing falls to ruin, ethical systems clash, and deficits weigh heavily upon the nations?

A major European task, such as organising and coordinating transport, which is the basis of and the key to trade, progress and culture, can be accomplished only with the good will of us all.

Freedom arises from order alone, an order that is provident, patient and wise, an order that is developed by all and careful to adapt the means that mankind has given itself to meet its real needs.

Raoul Dautry