

# Willcox Emphasizes Need for Mail Tubes

## Former Postmaster Gives Details of the Efficiency of the Device and Shows Weakness of Attacks Made on Its Retention by the Post Office Department

"AND so it seems to me nothing less than an attempted act of governmental sabotage against a great, invaluable public utility."

The speaker is William R. Willcox, ex-chairman of the Public Service Commission, ex-postmaster and now a member of the Railroad Commission, assisting Director-General McAdoo in the colossal task of welding a coherent whole out of America's railway system.

It was as ex-postmaster that Mr. Willcox gave his opinion on the campaign being waged against the pneumatic tube system of mail distribution.

"The proper decision of the pneumatic mail tube question," he said, "is as much the concern of patriotism as the solution of our transportation problem. Correspondence is the life blood of industry, and the discontinuance of pneumatic tube service would tie a stricture knot in the arteries of commerce."

### Used Successfully for Years.

Mr. Willcox explained that pneumatic tubes had been installed at Philadelphia in 1893, and with frequent extensions had been in constant and successful operation in the five chief cities of the country ever since. He emphasized that the original installation and the extensions had been made at the request of the Post Office Department, and thus the Government had invited the investment of private capital which it now threatens to make worthless. Other than the Post Office Department there is no customer for the eight-inch pneumatic tubes. Since the present Postmaster-General has endeavored to suspend their use, it has been proposed that the Government purchase and operate the tubes, and the post office appropriation bill now pending in the Senate contains an amendment to this effect.

"The printed literature on the tube question," said Mr. Willcox, "consisting of departmental reports and findings of investigating bodies, comprises thousands of printed pages, but the really pertinent facts and arguments are few and simple. It is significant that opinion on the tubes was almost uniformly favorable until the beginning of the present campaign against them, and that only since an adverse attitude has been taken by the higher officers of the department have postal officials and so-called experts discovered alleged glaring defects in tube service. There is an unpleasant effect about this, as of men moulding their opinions to court the favor of their superiors."

"The first attack on the tubes was made in 1916 in a report by a commission of five so-called postal experts, who were merely post office inspectors. Now, inspectors are valuable postal employees, but certainly not experts in any line but their own, which is a sort of detective work, watching for inefficiency and malfeasance among employees. Yet the opponents of tube service would persuade Congress to prefer their opinions to those of hundreds of business men, city officials, responsible editors, and even some of the most eminent members of both houses of Congress itself."

### Report Thoroughly Discredited.

"This preference for such expert testimony is inexplicable in view of the fact that this report has been more thoroughly discredited by investigation than any public document I have ever heard of. It seemed much like an attempted imposition upon Congress. F. B. De Bernard, director of research of the Merchants Association of New York, stated before a Congressional committee that if such a report had been rendered by professional investigators to any corporation employing them they would be forever debarred from further employment in research."

"The joint committee of Philadelphia Trades Bodies for the Retention of Pneumatic Tubes made a personal investigation of the allegations of these experts that the capacity of the tube containers is limited to five pounds, or 250 pieces of first class mail, and that the frequency of dispatch is only four containers a minute. These Philadelphia business men saw with their own eyes that under ordinary daily service conditions containers are regularly despatched at intervals of from five to eight and three-tenths seconds and contain an average of 8 3/4 pounds, or 438 pieces. The Merchants



Association of New York also made an investigation and found that under ordinary service conditions as many as 838 containers an hour could be despatched over a single tube line in New York, a frequency of 14 a minute.

"The Merchants Association analyzed the tests by which it had been sought to prove that motor vehicles were vastly more efficient than the tubes. They showed that test runs had been made in total disregard of service conditions. In Boston, for instance, 5 A. M. of a mid-summer Sunday was the time chosen for a test run—chosen because it presented the absolute minimum of street traffic. But the truly fraudulent character of the tests is shown by comparing the time made in these runs with the time allowed for actual service runs under the department's own schedule. Thus in Boston a run was made in 3 minutes 30 seconds over a route where the department's schedule allows ten minutes, and in Chicago a test run of seventeen minutes was

over a route which in actual service requires fifty-two minutes.

"The rest of this remarkable report is of a similar character, and the case against the tubes rests primarily upon this report. A Congressional commission has just reported the result of a careful investigation of the tube service. Three such eminent Senators as Mr. Bankhead of Alabama, Mr. Hardwick of Georgia and Mr. Weeks of Massachusetts and two eminent Representatives, Mr. Bell of Georgia and Mr. Stearnson of Minnesota, concurred in a finding which reiterated all the previous commendations of the tubes and recommended their purchase by the Government. Mr. Rouse of Kentucky presented a lone minority report, which, as I read it, is only a restatement of the previous allegations, eked out by quotations from briefs submitted by postal officials since the headline was set for disapproval of the tubes. These briefs are merely elaborate statements of every possible point which can

be made against the tubes, with a careful omission of everything that can be said for them. For instance, the postmaster of Philadelphia in comparing the time required to despatch mail by tube and by truck included the time required to bundle, load, unload and distribute the tube load, but omitted the time consumed in pouching, loading, unloading and distributing the truck load.

"The critics of the tubes are particularly unfortunate when they insinuate that all who have testified in favor of tube service are either hired agents or dupes of the tube companies. Putting aside the fact that I am one of those so stigmatized, need I point out the folly of such an allegation against hundreds of business men, Mayors, police officials, ex-postmasters and Congressmen? The argument is equally weak which insinuates that the tubes are a worn out property, approaching the condition of junk, which is supposed to account for the desire of their owners to unload them on the Government. Investigations by the 1914 commission and by able engineers of the present commission show that the tubes are a highly developed, efficient utility, in such good condition that they have an indicated life of fifty years to come.

### Gist of the Case for the Tubes.

"The gist of the case for the tubes is just this. They render specific postal services which cannot be rendered by any other means. The tube containers whirl along underground regardless of surface traffic congestion at a rate of thirty miles an hour, or five times the average speed attainable by vehicles in crowded city streets. They are always available. Mail is forwarded by tube as quickly as it is sorted without waiting for a truck load to accumulate. This results in greatly expediting the despatch of from five to seven million pieces of first class mail a day in the five tube cities. The record of their daily service is truly impressive, for they forward 25,000,000 letters every twenty-four hours.

"I cannot help marveling that a service which handles 25,000,000 letters daily should be referred to as antiquated and worthless. I share the amazement expressed by a Cabinet member when he was told that it was proposed to eliminate a service with a speed of thirty miles an hour to increase the use of one with a speed of five or six.

"Two or three million pieces of other than first class mail are forwarded weekly by the tubes, but they are primarily and distinctly a first class mail facility. First class mail deserves a grade of service superior to all other classes. Promptness of delivery is an essential part of its value. Moreover, the rate of payment for it averages 48 cents a pound, while all other mail is carried at an average of a cent a pound. Eighty per cent. of the mail tonnage is carried at a loss. The rural delivery system is run at a loss, yet no one would think of depriving the country dwellers of this boon. All that the twelve million people of the tube cities ask is that the Government shall not deprive them of the boon of quick, sure despatch of first class mail.

### Would Invade Streets Again.

"In place of this speedy, efficient, unobstructible tube service for first class mail it is proposed, to the dismay of all who must daily experience the dangers and inconveniences of traffic congestion in our great cities, to put more motor trucks on the streets! New York invested \$400,000,000 in subways to take traffic off the streets. Each of the other tube cities has been put to proportionate expense for the same purpose. New York and Philadelphia have had to cut new streets at tremendous expense. Still congestion increases, paralyzing business and causing death and injury.

"It is a fact that, as ex-Postmaster Morgan of New York testified before a Congressional committee, in snowy weather mail automobiles intended to make train connections must be started thirty minutes ahead of schedule, thus depriving countless thousands of pieces of mail of the connections, and yet in hundreds of cases they miss the trains! But the tubes work steadily on schedule time in all weathers.

"To abolish the tubes and increase the trucks therefore would be as absurd as to close the subways and rely on buses. Progress demands more tubes."

## Austrian's View of Bolsheviki

The following picture of the Bolsheviki is of interest as helping to explain certain phases of the Russian revolution. It was written for the "Neue Freie Presse" of Vienna by an Austrian who took part in the Petrograd conference for the exchange of prisoners.

If you ask yourself what kind of people these Bolsheviki are, what is in their mind, you have to go back to the structure of the Russian population and also to the history of this people.

As to the first point, the revolution found beside a top layer of the fabulously rich a numberless multitude who possessed nothing and had almost no rights at all. The middle class of well to do citizens and farmers was not numerous. The conflict between rich and poor was aggravated by the power of the Government in the hands of the rich wielded mercilessly and cruelly against the lower strata.

What is happening now is nothing but an insurrection of slaves with all the hatred, the envy, the vengeance peculiar to such, but also with all the cruelty and brutality that have become characteristic of a people abandoned and uncultured, treated like beasts for hundreds of years. It is to be noted, too, that the younger element takes a prominent part in the Bolshevik movement. Besides it is to be considered that all these men, whether young or old, heretofore were excluded from all practical activity in public life

and thus confined themselves to a wholly abstract doctrinaireism.

We know the stories describing Russian political refugees in the cafés of Zurich, Switzerland, for instance, debating and discussing all night long, all the while smoking and drinking tea. Indeed it seems to be one of the main passions of the Russians to play with thoughts, to turn them over on all sides without reaching any conclusion.

For us it was very painful at the conference when our Russian colleagues enjoyed nothing better than to drag out the most complicated and endless discussions. A lot of time was thus wasted. These people know no hurry. This is true not only of the Bolsheviki. I noticed the same inclination of other Russians with whom I had previous negotiations.

If the masses of the Bolsheviki are raw, ignorant individuals, then their leaders are merely believers in a religion, a new religion, with all the fanaticism and self-sacrifice peculiar to such believers. It should be stated without qualification that the leaders of the movement, such as Lenin and Trotsky, are absolutely honest men, men obsessed with the mania to bring happiness to their people according to their system, men who are willing to wade through streams of blood in order to realize their dreams. We found the same obsession with the Spanish inquisition and the Jacobins.