

A LOOK BACK IN TIME

Stanley Roth has forwarded the following pages which are extracts from a book entitled *Taxi* by Anthony Armstrong, which was published by Hodder & Stoughton in about 1930. The book took a look back over 30 years at the London Motor Taxi as it appeared in the early 1900's to the 'modern' times of 1930! Now over 70 years later, some things have not

changed. Stanley says: "With regard to the appointment of Bob Oddy to the TfL Board, I have to say that Bob and I do not see eye to eye over certain issues, but I wish him the best of luck and he will speak up for us. Because we have waited a long time for this moment."

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popularize taxi riding, and also issued leaflets to show how cheaply taxi runs could be made in and around London; but the response was most disappointing, barely a quarter of London's cabs bothering to support it. In the meanwhile Mr. Nicholls, the editor of *The Taxi World*, has on his own initiative got out a little booklet of illustrations of the different facets of taxi service, interleaved and brightened by taxi jokes, for distribution by drivers to customers. So, too, has *The Green Badge*. But these are small battles; a big campaign is needed, and it is upon a crusade of up-to-date publicity that I suggest the whole taxi trade should embark if it wants to prosper. To be frank, they are fools if they don't.

It may have been noticed that all the suggestions made in this chapter have one thing in common. That is, in order to put them into effect with the minimum of trouble and expense and the maximum of resultant value, there must be *one central authority representing the whole taxi trade*. As things are, unfortunately, there are about six—two associations of cab proprietors, two of owner-drivers, and two unions of drivers, one of which even is a mere offshoot from a big trade union, with whose other half million members the cabbies have practically nothing in common; and it is this multiplicity of associations

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which is the real stumbling block to progress. It is admitted that the different sections of the cab trade have varying aims, but it seems they are in danger of forgetting that they have any aim in common at all. The result is that everybody pulls different ways and the wood cannot be seen for the trees. Small wonder that eight thousand London taxis have no representative on the Traffic Advisory Committee, while four thousand buses have two. Small wonder that an increasing number of streets are being closed to unhired cabs; that taxis rather than other vehicles get prosecutions for traffic crimes; and that profitable ranks are removed as dangerous obstructions, often only to be replaced by bus stops or parking places for private cars. Small wonder that so many proprietors and drivers hardly consider it worth while being attached to any association. Small wonder that it is increasingly difficult to raise money for an advertising campaign when there is a large proportion of drivers who are so independent that they refuse to pay for it, but are not above sharing in its benefits.

What, in the humble, but settled opinion of one outsider, the cab trade really needs, is to reorganize all existing associations, cut loose from the unwieldy Transport and General Workers' Union, and form one big federation

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to which proprietors, owner-drivers and journeymen will, and *must* for their own benefit, belong. Within this federation they will form three separate sections, with sub-committees to represent and guard each specialized or conflicting interest, the owner-drivers' policy, of course, swinging, as it were, between the two others according to whether they are affected as owners or as drivers. All disputes between these different sections can, and ought, thus to be settled internally; but the main federation itself will have one central committee which will authoritatively represent the taxi point of view to all external bodies whatsoever. Speaking then, as it will be doing, for the whole trade, it will be able to secure adequate representation of interests both in parliament, before commissions, and on committees. It will be able to pursue, and what is more important, have more power to put into effect, a definite policy regarding cruising cabs, the increasing of the number of ranks and the marking of them, publicity campaigns, unfair prosecutions, smartness of cabs and drivers and hiring lights. It will be able to tackle with authority such vexed questions as tipping, fare scales and the limitation of the number of licensed cabs or licensed drivers. It will be able to save on the trade's present four-fold office expenses

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and to secure financial benefits from the wholesale buying of supplies—at present about £50,000 a year is lost to owner-drivers of the cab trade in the retail price profit of petrol alone. It will even in time be able to deal with such possibilities as the establishment of one Taxi Drivers' Benevolent and Financial Assistance Fund, instead of several (some of them not above suspicion), and the provision of a central club or cab headquarters combined with, say, a booking bureau for taxicabs from which one may engage a cab for a stated journey at a stated time, instead of taking one's chance off the nearest rank, and which may even arrange for the quick transfer of cabs from temporarily poor areas to areas where there is a sudden demand. It will, in short, present to all outside parties, poms and powers, a united front. It will—if it comes into being. But first it must overcome the innate grumbling-cheerful, surly-friendly independence of George the London taxi driver.

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