

Outlaws Operate Highway Transports, I. C. C. Discloses

Criminals Said to Run "Share-the-Expense" Schemes;
Hauling Strikebreakers Specialty of "Wildcats"

The amazing story of an underworld highway transportation system which has grown to Big Business proportions, operates through 200 so-called "share the expense" travel bureaus throughout the country, is infested with criminals and is completely unregulated, has been disclosed by hearings which the Interstate Commerce Commission held at many cities during the past few months.

Transporting strikebreakers is one specialty of these "wildcat" carriers, the hearings revealed.

The commission's examiner, W. W. McCaslin, questioned scores of witnesses, among them railroad and bus company officials, Better Business Bureau and Travelers' Aid Society representatives, "travel bureau" operators, and their victims. The testimony fills five bulky volumes. Some of the high lights are:

An Appalling Picture

That thousands of men, some of whom own automobiles and others who are hired to drive them, are

transporting passengers all over the country, at a regular schedule of "cut-price" rates. Many of these drivers are criminals and "fugitives from justice," many are "narcotic addicts." They drive at reckless speeds for 30 hours and more "at a stretch," often "drinking while driving."

They get their passengers from the "travel bureaus," which maintain offices in stores and other "holes in the wall," advertise in newspapers and telephone directories, and "pretend to sell transportation by the share-the-expense method, using privately-owned automobiles."

Passengers Abused

In the jargon of this strange business, these bureaus are called "angels." They are not the legitimate travel bureaus which sell rail, highway and ship transportation.

"This method of transportation has frequently resulted in abandonment, robbery, injury and death of passengers, and even in rape of female passengers," it was testified.

"The unsafe equipment used is a menace to the public. No insurance is carried by either the bureaus or the drivers, so passengers are left with no recourse whatsoever.

"Many operators of these vehicles and travel bureaus are directly connected with hotels, rooming houses, and saloons of ill repute, who relieve their patrons of all their valuables. They employ the vehicles to transport their victims to remote localities, and throw them out there while unconscious."

Have National Organization

The record of the hearings is filled with shocking and heart-rending stories of men and women who were robbed of their money, baggage, and even their clothes, stripped almost naked and then abandoned along the road in a penniless and desperate condition.

These bureaus not only advertise locally, but also "maintain a national organization, and nationally advertise a scale of fixed rates for passengers, free accommodations for drivers, and transfers through affiliated bureaus throughout the country."

Back of the commission's hearings is this story:

Result of First Inquiry

In 1935, Congress passed the Motor Carrier Act, giving the I. C. C. power to regulate highway transportation, but authorizing the commission to exempt "casual or occasional" carriers, who do not make a regular business of hauling freight or passengers by road.

In 1938, the commission investigated the "share-the-expense" travel

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RACKET OPERATORSON HIGHWAYS EXPOSED

I. C. C. Report Reveals Ring Of
Criminals Running Cars
On Roads

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bureaus to determine whether they were casual or regular carriers of passengers, discovered their nefarious practices, prosecuted them, and sent 29 bureau operators to penitentiaries.

The remaining bureau operators "got wise," and developed elaborate methods for avoiding detection. Now, according to the testimony, they "shift their drivers around" from route to route, so they cannot be identified as "regular" drivers.

Hard to Catch Offenders

They "give fictitious addresses and false names, use stolen cars and stolen license plates, and change their plates frequently while en route."

As a result, the commission found it so hard to identify these outlaw carriers that it decided not to attempt to regulate them until it could get more power from Congress. For that purpose, the commission several times proposed an amendment to the Motor Carrier Act, but Congress did not pass it.

Finally, the National Bus Traffic Association asked the commission to hold this series of hearings to see what could be done to stop this underworld competition with the regular bus and rail carriers.

Most Feasible Remedy

At the hearings, the railroads supported the bus association, which contended that the commission can easily and quickly end this "share-the-expense" racket by simply forbidding the so-called travel bureaus to act as a go-between, getting passengers for the drivers.

Without the bureaus, the bus association spokesmen said, the drivers who make "share the expense" a regular business cannot exist, but nothing will or should stop a private automobile owner from occasionally carrying someone else on a genuine share-the-expense basis.