PROGRESS

or

BREAK DOWN?

With the Compliments of

The Victorian Railways Commissioners

RAILWAYS HEAD OFFICE,
SPENCER STREET, MELBOURNE.

Progress . . .

or

Breakdown ?

THERE is so much misunderstanding, and so many mis-statements are being made about contracts for the supply of locomotives and other rolling stock, that it has been decided to publish the *facts*.

It became abundantly clear after the last war that Victorian railway service—service long vaunted as second to none in Australia—would soon be in serious danger of partial collapse if a large number of new engines and trucks could not be obtained promptly.

The obvious question arises: why had the rolling stock deteriorated to such an extent? The answer is simple, if grim. For some years prior to the war there was a persistent shortage of funds for railway purposes. Instead of building a necessary minimum of twenty locomotives and four hundred trucks each year, the Victorian Railways Workshops, then and since, have been able to average only three engines and two hundred or so trucks, a year.

The war came, and with it abnormal demands on the railway workshops, and a tremendous increase in the wear and tear on railway equipment. Not only were the numbers of serviceable units inadequate for requirements, but excessive expenditure had to be incurred in keeping a large

amount of obsolete and worn out stock in commission.

At the end of the war, manpower was in very short supply ; so were materials, and the need for new rolling stock was becoming inexorably and progressively more urgent.

LET us, here, for the sake of clarity, interpolate a complete survey of departmental workshop construction and scrappings over the past two decades.

Year ended 30th June	LOCOMOTIVES		TRUCKS	
	Constructed	Broken Up	Constructed	Broken Up
1933 ...	—	—	—	101
1934 ...	—	31	201	202
1935 ...	—	17	241	176
1936 ...	—	—	202	172
1937 ...	1	15	332	379
1938 ...	—	14	301	297
1939 ...	7	—	360	390
1940 ...	1	—	285	476
1941 ...	18	7	138	370
1942 ...	11	21	341	137
1943 ...	8	2	147	177
1944 ...	3	1	221	286
1945 ...	—	16	130	155
1946 ...	5	2	402	223
1947 ...	6	3	262	38
1948 ...	2	2	71	182
1949 ...	—	—	246	89
1950 ...	—	2	216	202
1951 ...	2	23	102	111
1952 ...	1	24	132	218
TOTAL	65	180	4,330	4,381
AVERAGE EACH YEAR	3·5	9·0	217	219

It will be noted that during the above 20-year period the number of locomotives broken up exceeded the construction in departmental workshops by 115, and that the number of trucks constructed was less than the number scrapped. The new locomotives and trucks were, of course, of greater capacity than those scrapped, but, in the case of the trucks, nearly 5,000 16-ton trucks have, by Government direction in 1927, been marked down for use as 11-ton trucks when required, in lieu of small capacity vehicles which have been broken up.

The normal economic life of a railway locomotive is 25 years. At June 30th, 1952, the average age of all Victorian Railway locomotives was 30.7 years. The truck stock is in a somewhat similar plight. The economic life of a truck is 30 years. At June 30th, 1952, the average age of all trucks was 32.8 years. On the score of age alone, therefore, the urgency of implementing a big renewal programme in the shortest possible time is abundantly clear.

EVERY effort was made after the war to obtain more men for the workshops, but as the result of the higher wages paid in many outside industries (the Department, in accordance with Governmental policy, has adhered to award rates), it was not possible to obtain anything like enough staff for requirements. Even if a large number of men had been available, the shortage of materials would, in any event, have seriously restricted the amount of rolling stock that could have been constructed.

Early in 1949, at the request of the Government, Mr. John Elliot, now Chairman of the

Executive, British Railways (he was then General Manager, Southern Region, B.R.) came here to inquire into the organization of the Victorian Railways. In his subsequent report, he said :—

> " *A very considerable programme of rehabilitation and re-equipment must be taken in hand without further delay, if a serious breakdown is to be avoided. The Commissioners have shown me their general plans, and they seem to me sound and sufficiently far-reaching to serve the main purpose for which they are designed.*"

He also said—and this is highly relevant to the main point at issue :

> " *The prices now ruling are high, certainly much higher than if all the work were undertaken in the Railways own workshops. But there is neither the workshop capacity, the staff nor the raw material to enable this to be done, and I can only affirm with all the emphasis at my command, that if these orders are not placed as soon as possible for steady delivery over the next ten years, the ultimate price which the State and the people of Victoria will pay in transport inefficiency, delays and in final breakdown of railway transport will be still heavier.*"

The plans he mentioned later became known as *Operation Phoenix*. In implementing them, the Commissioners regretfully, in the face of what was fast becoming critical urgency, were impelled to waive the traditional policy of relying mainly on the output of their own workshops, and to seek outside contractors for locomotives and trucks.

SOME time elapsed before private builders of rolling stock could be found who were prepared to offer firm delivery dates, but ultimately the following contracts were entered into. The dates are also given :

Date of Contract	For the supply of—
9.8.48 ...	50 " N " class engines.
21.9.49 ...	50 " R " class engines.
12.1.50 ...	20 " R " class engines.
	70
21.6.50 ...	50 " J " class engines.
26.1.51 ...	10 " J " class engines.
	60
16.8.48 ...	10 Diesel shunting engines.
17.5.46 ...	12 102 h.p. Diesel rail cars.
18.8.46 ...	6 153 h.p. Diesel rail cars and trailers.
1.10.47 ...	6 280 h.p. Diesel rail cars.
19.2.48 ...	6 280 h.p. Diesel rail cars.
3.5.50 ...	9 153 h.p. Diesel rail cars and trailers.
	39
15.8.49 ...	26 Diesel-electric locos.
9.3.50 ...	17 Electric locomotives.
20.4.51 ...	8 Electric locomotives.
	25
21.2.49 ...	250 GY 22-ton trucks.
15.8.49 ...	500 GY 22-ton trucks.
30.11.49	250 GY 22-ton trucks.
16.5.50 ...	1500 GY 22-ton trucks.
29.5.50 ...	500 GY 22-ton trucks.
	3000
24.1.52 ...	Electric equipments for 30 suburban trains.

Since these contracts were made, the following new rolling stock has been delivered to the Railways :

50 " N " class locomotives.
64 " R " class locomotives.
10 Diesel shunting engines.
31 Diesel rail cars.
1 Diesel-electric locomotive.
1,825 goods trucks.

During the next 18 months it is expected that the following additional rolling stock will be delivered under the existing contracts—

6 " R " class locomotives.
25 Diesel-electric locomotives.
25 Electric locomotives.
60 " J " class locomotives.
8 rail cars.
1,175 goods trucks.

It is beyond question that the Department could not have constructed, in its own shops and in the time required, anything like the amount of essential equipment that has been obtained under contract.

It is equally beyond question that, if prompt action had not been taken to acquire the new rolling stock, the Department's ability to give service would have been seriously restricted, with grievous effects on transport. Moreover, the cost of rolling stock maintenance would have become even more uneconomic.

THE most pressing needs now are replacements for the suburban electric services. The only carriage stock constructed during the past 25 years has been six trains during the period 1944/51, and as the result, a large proportion of the stock is now obsolete and nearing the worn-out state. No fewer than 323 of the suburban cars in service are over 40 years of age (more than half that number are over 60 years old) and, apart from the poor state of the carriages themselves, the condition of the electric motors is giving cause for concern. Beside the pressing need for replacements, provision should be made to meet growing traffic demands, and to give improved service, particularly to the outer suburbs.

In view of the large amount of new rolling stock required and the unpromising outlook for reinforcing workshop staff and getting materials, governmental approval was sought last year for the purchase of 50 new suburban trains—350 carriages. The Government agreed to 30 new trains, and deferred a decision on the balance of 20 until this financial year. A contract has been let for the supply of the electric motors required for the 30 trains, and tenders have been invited, returnable in October next, for the supply of 210 carriages. Because of the unfavourable loan fund outlook, it is not proposed at present to seek authority for the remaining 20 trains needed.

IN addition to suburban train replacements, a vast amount of rolling stock rehabilitation still remains to be undertaken. A large number of modern air-conditioned carriages are needed for country lines, as well as additional goods trucks, livestock trucks, louvre trucks, refrigerated trucks, trucks for pulverized fuel, guards' vans and powder

vans. This programme, together with the conversion of a large number of steam locomotives to burn pulverized brown coal, and as much suburban train construction as circumstances permit, will be more than enough with the materials available to keep fully employed all the workshops staff that is likely to be obtainable in the next few years.

ALL this, then, is why the Victorian Railways are compelled to rely largely on outside contracts to complete *Operation Phoenix* and ensure a rehabilitated and efficient service.

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