

RAILROAD CONDITIONS IN MEXICO

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Contributed by Gerald Hook

An interesting account of the deplorable condition of the Mexican railways due to the warfare in that country is published by the Chicago Daily News from its special correspondent at Mexico City, who reports that instead of being ready to handle the commerce of the country when peace is restored most of the rolling stock of the National Railways system has been destroyed.

He quotes Alberto J. Pani, director general of the Constitutionalist lines, as declaring that more than 70% of the standard-gage cars of the system have been destroyed and less than 16% are available for commercial purposes. The remaining 14% are either laid up for repairs or are being used by soldiers.

"The service is sufficient to move the necessities of life, prevent starvation in the cities and carry those absolutely obliged to travel. Freight for the most part does not move and those who can postpone trips do so rather than face the hardships.

"Closing of the Panama Canal would naturally throw much of that transcontinental business on the road across the isthmus of Tehuantepec. But it cannot handle it, as its one-time rolling stock is gone and the steamship companies cannot get guaranties from the government that their shipments will be protected from bandits in the short distance overland between the oceans. Vessels again are making the long trip around the Horn.

"In Vera Cruz, the big warehouses are crammed to the roofs, the terminal company has just notified consignees that storage charges will be doubled, but they are helpless to move the goods even if charges are increased tenfold, as there are not enough cars. With the government recognized, steamships from New York have resumed weekly sailings and are unloading thousands more tons of freight on the Vera Cruz docks.

"Most of the railroad property has been destroyed in the last 18 months. It is the hardest blow at the nation's prosperity in the entire six years of revolutions. Hardly a station has not been burned between Monterey and Mexico City. Along all the roads are overturned locomotives, remains of wrecked cars, twisted rails and other signs of ruin. With railroad transportation cut off cities are isolated, mines, mills and factories are silent, fields uncultivated, stores empty and the countryside relapsing to primitive condition because supplies cannot be brought in or produce shipped out.

"Every day has meant more cars and locomotives retired from service due to wrecks, breakdowns and other incidents. To one who has ridden through the country where two-thirds of the cars one sees are inhabited by officers and soldiers and their families, it would appear that Mr. Pani is also very lenient in estimating the number of cars in military service."

Director-General Pani is quoted as saying that the government expects to continue controlling the majority of the stock of the railroads, and that the law which gave the government the right to take over the railroads in war time requires that they be returned to the company in operating condition, and that an indemnity be paid, based on the previous five years' earnings, with 10 per cent additional.

Regarding plans for the restoration of service, he says: "We plan first to purchase enough passenger cars to re-establish the former service between Laredo and Mexico City. Plans now are being made also for the purchase of freight cars, rails and other material. A single order for 1,000,000 ties has been placed.

As fast as we get possession, the shops are opened up. All are at work repairing rolling stock. The military still gets first claim on the service, but each day its demands diminish and in the same proportion is increased the equipment which the roads can place at the disposition of the public for the transportation of passengers and freight."

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Officers of the International Railways of Central America and the National Railways of Mexico are making preparations for the inauguration of through freight and passenger service between Mexico and Guatemala. They expect to run through sleeping cars between the two capitals.

The Guatemala Central division of the International Railways of Central America was completed to a connection with the Pan-American division of the National Railways of Mexico at Ayntia several months ago. But because of the bad condition of internal affairs of Mexico, no interchange of cars has been permitted.

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