

Enterprise Denied: Origins of the Decline of American Railroads, 1897-1917. By Albro Martin. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971. Pp. xiv, 402. Notes, appendix, bibliography, index. \$10.95.)

This was the prize winning book in the first Columbia University contest in American economic history in honor of Allan Nevins. The preface by Stuart Bruchey of Columbia University is rather unusual in that it would serve quite satisfactorily as a review.

Professor Martin set out to examine the real nature of the "railroad problem" which he learned about as he grew up. He discovered that the problem had been around for more years than he had thought and that its nature was quite different than was presented in conventional textbook accounts. The more he researched the more he discovered that the difficulties were accentuated greatly by "archaic Progressivists" and that the principal culprits were most active in the period after 1910. Railroad capital requirements were expanding and costs were rising, but general rate increases proved unobtainable. A little group of commissioners—goaded by the people's lawyer, Louis Brandeis—thwarted attempts of the railroads to obtain relief. Weakness inevitably ensued. The railroads could not meet rising labor demands, and, in the course of time, operations were taken over by the government in World War I. Martin gives a detailed and at times dramatic account of the rate proceedings.

The book is written in a vigorous style, and the author may well be accused of being highly opinionated. Something about the style invites or forces disagreement, but, on the other hand, the breadth of research and the vigor of the arguments tend to cow a critic. Strong statements can be forgiven when there is evidence that the author has already done his homework. For the most part this has to be conceded.

The writing style is sprightly and at times a trifle florid. The first part of the book is somewhat difficult to follow. As the narrative continues, the focus becomes clearer and the style sharper, and interest heightens. Although Martin indicts—and perhaps convicts—the majority of the commission and Brandeis of actions that ultimately were harmful to the railroads, shippers, and the nation, he may deal too lightly with the railroad leaders themselves. Almost as convincing a case could be made that the industry spokesmen were somewhat incompetent because they failed to muster convincing data and to evaluate the nature of the opposition to their cause. This does not exonerate the "archaic progressives" but does suggest that the other side ought to have been clever enough to outmaneuver them.

It is hard to believe that the root of the decline of the American

railroads was so largely embodied within the confines of the period and the forces with which Martin deals. The seeds of difficulty may be located in an earlier period, and regulation does not appear primarily responsible for the railroads' demise, but elaboration of this position would entail a lengthy argument not advanced here. Certain imputations from the statistical material presented in the appendix also weaken the thesis rather than strengthen it. Finally, the author expresses the intention to concentrate on the Pennsylvania, the Illinois Central, and the Santa Fe to describe the physical and financial transformation of American railroads in the Progressive Era. This declaration of intention was hardly worthwhile since little is done along this line, particularly with regard to the Santa Fe.

Although one can quibble with the book because it is written in such a virile manner, it probably merits its first prize in relation to most of the books on this subject. It is provocative and informative. An enormous amount of scholarship has gone into its production with a result likely to please railroad buffs, historians, and critics of commission regulation and to nettle a few readers not otherwise classified.

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Henry Ford and Grass-roots America. By Reynold M. Wik. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1972. Pp. viii, 266. Illustrations, notes, index. \$10.00.)

Henry Ford appears to have an unending attraction for biographers, both amateur and professional. Wik is a professional with a lifetime of research in farm technology to apply to his subject. He is undertaking here to explain Ford's relationship to rural America: on one side, why and how rural America regarded Ford as a folk hero; on the other, Ford's own attitudes toward farmers and farming. There is something ironic in the picture. In his youth Ford so thoroughly detested farm life that he left home as soon as he could to work with machinery in nearby Detroit. As a successful industrialist he considered himself as having a special mission to use mechanization for the benefit of the farmer, and rural America came to regard him as a miracle worker with a special understanding of farm problems.

Professor Wik has skillfully used newspapers and magazines, public relations and advertising statements, and much archival material to depict this phenomenon. He gives the reader detailed accounts of the impact of the Model T on rural life, Ford's efforts at tractor development, his experiments with soybeans, his plan for fertilizer production at Muscle Shoals, and above all, how farmers saw Henry Ford.