

Slaughter on the Pennsy

Long Island is deeply sympathetic with New Jersey over the appalling loss of life and injuries to New Jersey commuters suffered Tuesday night at Woodbridge. Our memories of the horror of wrecks on the Long Island Rail Road are bitterly fresh. Again, men and women homeward bound from work have been the victims. Again they were crushed in cars owned by the Pennsylvania Railroad.

As investigations of the Pennsy wreck get under way, the questions are painfully familiar. Why was the engineer taking his train through Woodbridge twice as fast as he should have done? Why didn't he see a warning signal? What was wrong with the newly opened construction by-pass?—Here again are questions involving employe morale, safety devices, and, as at Rockville Centre, safeguarding the traveling public when temporary construction is necessary.

Less than a month ago, the Pennsylvania Railroad in an advertisement signed by its president, Walter P. Franklin, disclaimed responsibility for the shattering of LIRR's safety record. Passing the buck to the New York Public Service Commission for its "starvation policy," Franklin blamed all on LIRR's commutation fare rates.

In New Jersey, Pennsy operates a commuter service at rates by far the highest of all commuter lines out of New York City. Nor do those Jersey lines operate, as Franklin puts it in the case of LIRR, "continuously at a loss, with constant criticism and ridicule." Nevertheless, what happened on Long Island has happened in Jersey.

The inevitable conclusion drawn from this tragic coincidence is that the Pennsylvania Railroad, although the world's largest, is callously indifferent to the commuter lines it owns. Not that this is new. The Patterson Commission that investigated the LIRR for Governor Dewey after the Thanksgiving Eve wreck reported, "We find the overwhelming weight of opinion . . . is that first consideration, after restoration of safety and morale, is the complete and permanent separation of the Long Island from control of the Pennsylvania Railroad."

The wreck at Woodbridge underlines the urgency of this permanent separation. Let those inclined to oppose creation of a Long Island Transit Authority take good note.

Third-Time Charm?

The latest move to cut Nassau County in on the tax take at Roosevelt Raceway is reasonable, but hopeless. If the state were so big-hearted as to divvy up, Nassau would reap annually more than \$400,000 revenue from the trotting track. No other county in the state, except possibly Westchester, would gain from this proposed legislation. Other counties would lose with the state.

Actually, the proposal is a political sop on the part of Nassau Republicans in answer to local Democratic criticism that the GOP never seriously tried to put a local bite on the Westbury track. Introduced by Senator John D. Bennett of Rockville Centre and Assemblyman Frank J. Becker of Lynbrook, the bill was presented with "hope" that the Democrats would support it. It is the third such try. New York City Democrats and upstate Republicans alike are expected to give it a quick heave-ho.

The state of New York, clinging tightly to this racetrack tax, (last year it took \$4,299,000 from Roosevelt Raceway betting), helps finance itself with the very gambling money that Governor Dewey so piously abhors. If it would be immoral to permit pari-mutuel betting away from the track, and tax same for the state's benefit, why is it kosher to take gambling money from inside the track with which to run mental hospitals, build thruways, and buy school lunches?

Nassau's share of the tax revenue from Belmont Park, which has done wonders in enlarging Meadowbrook Hospital, is now being annually diminished to the vanishing point. When that source of revenue is gone, why shouldn't the county reap harvest from the trotting race industry?

The whole tax system at Roosevelt Raceway requires revision. But the Bennett-Becker proposal is hardly the answer. Chiefly because it hasn't the chance of the proverbial snowball to get by the Albany lawmakers. We doubt if its sponsors ever dreamed that it did have a chance.