

Letters to the Editor

Treacherous Subway Tunnels: Time for a High-Level Inquiry

To the Editor:

Twice in two weeks, subway trains have stalled for long periods in the sweltering East River tubes. First it was a derailment, then a cave-in.

In the five years since the M.T.A. took over, the accident rate has soared unimaginably and service was generally deteriorating at the same time. Nobody knows when an accident is going to happen, but it is becoming gruesomely evident that passengers must be gotten out of the tubes quickly when one does.

Since several of the fatalities that have occurred under the leadership of the Ronan-Rockefeller-G.O.P. team have involved the East River tubes—but with a two-year "breathing space" since the last one—it is now time for an independent high-level investigation to determine why the previous inquiry did not result in adequate recommendations or, if it did, why they were not satisfactorily implemented. Surely an injured man does not have to be kept without medical aid for over an hour in intense heat until he dies.

Many questions deserve to be asked. Did the severing of the radio cable by the falling tunnel roof activate an alarm that let the dispatcher know that this radio failure was especially significant? Was he able to initiate a "battle plan," prepared for the contingency, that would mobilize the necessary resources? Did the plan work? Had it been tested?

Did other agencies know what they were supposed to do? Was the Manhattan-bound track—which is accessible at that point and remained operable—used effectively? Are the third rails sectioned properly so that the part of the train which is disabled can be isolated and the rest of the train uncoupled and moved out of the tube before anyone else has died?

Did anyone know that there is a stairway up to First Avenue at this precise point that could have been used for access, egress and inward

ventilation once the initial fire was put out?

Was there an accumulation of flammable rubbish in the tube? Were there enough phones? How were the ventilators used? After an hour-long delay why were there no doctors with cardiac kits accompanying the police and firemen?

Major accidents seem to represent some sort of ghoully status symbol to the members of the Fire Department. The Mayor shows up for the photographers, the necessary press releases are written "decrying this dreadful tragedy," and the survivors breathe a sigh of relief.

But New York, this once-great city deserves better than this. Will the real Honest Politician please stand up?

JOHN F. WATERMAN
Brooklyn, Aug. 30, 1973

To the Editor:

As you rightly observed in an Aug. 30 editorial, the 42d Street tunnel was originally constructed for trolleys—though never used as a passenger conduit until 1915, when the IRT developed service between Manhattan and Queens.

It is questionable that this was the first tunnel between boroughs—since the Harlem River tube had been constructed in the early years of the century and opened in 1904, connecting the Bronx and Manhattan in what would soon be a web of steel subway tracks.

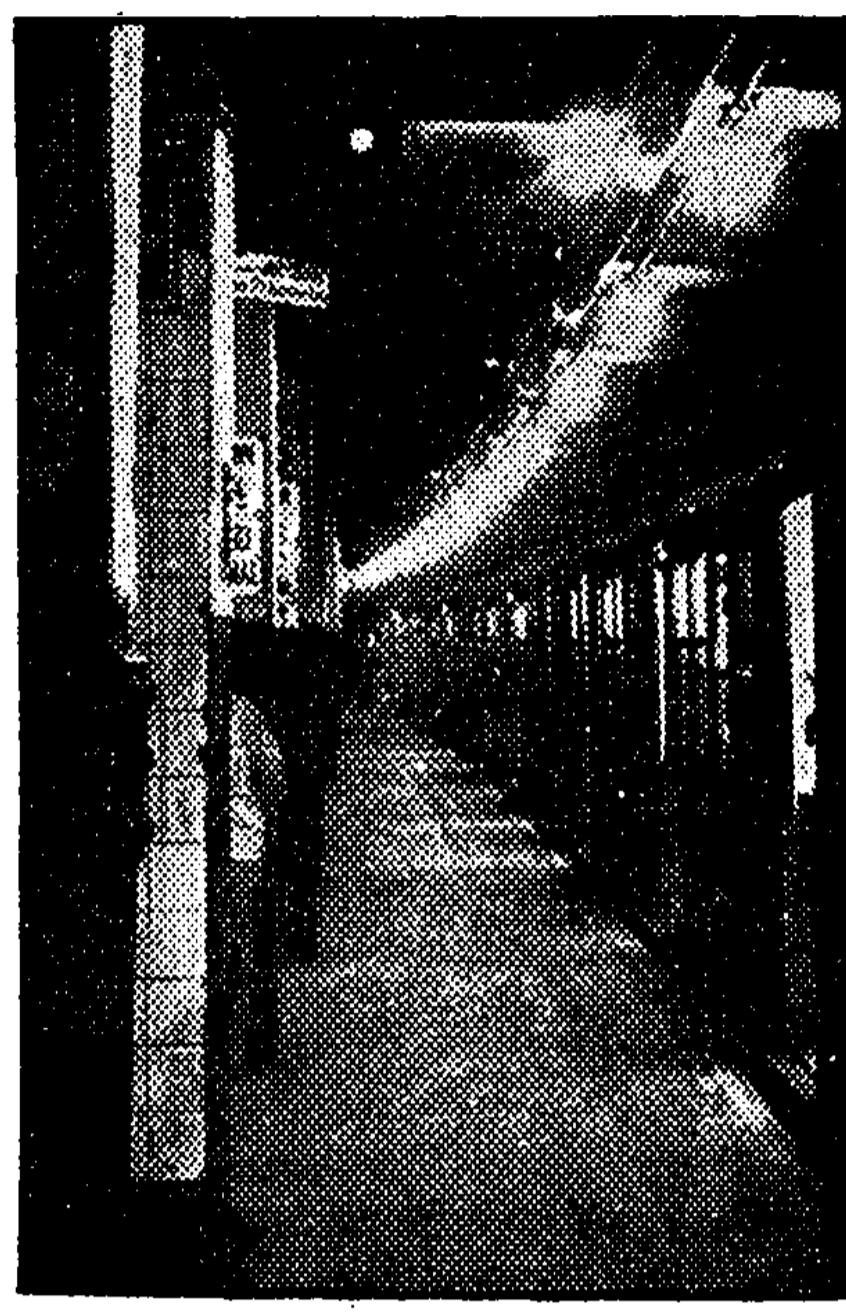
Reasons why the 42d Street tunnel was not used for trolleys include planning ineptitude by the original sponsors as well as some quick-thinking political gamesmanship as the city took over ownership when the Steinway Street Railway's original franchise expired before the trolley company had inaugurated passenger service. August Belmont, entrepreneur of the IRT, was alert to the possibilities of

interborough transit—and made his bid for the city's elephantine hole in the ground. The old tunnel has served the city well since. J. PORTER REILLY
New York, Aug. 30, 1973

To the Editor:

Your Aug. 29 news article "1,000 Trapped in an IRT Tunnel Accident" failed to mention that perhaps there should be a regular maintenance program to insure against such frightening accidents.

On a cooler day last week, riding on an old A train from upper Manhattan during the morning rush hour, the passengers were terrorized by smoke from a fire somewhere in the train. It was a long ride from 125th to 59th Street—long enough to think of the possibilities. The possibility happened for 1,000 other people, and one of them is dead. New Yorkers will quietly die with the city. We have no other choice. CAROL KENLER
New York, Aug. 29, 1973



New Drug Law—'The Madness Will Pass'

To the Editor:

In 1589, fourteen unfortunates condemned to death for witchcraft appealed the judgment to the parliament of Paris. The parliament named four commissioners—Pierre Pilgray, the king's surgeon, and Messieurs Leroi, Renard and Falaiseau, the king's physicians, to visit and examine these witches to see whether they had the mark of the devil upon them. Dr. Pilgray, in his work on surgery, explains, "We found them to be very poor, stupid people, and some of them insane. Many of them were quite indifferent about life, and one or two of them desired death as a relief from their sufferings. Our opinion was that they stood more in need of medicine than of punishment; and so we reported to the parliament. Their case was thereupon taken into further consideration; and the parliament, after mature counsel amongst all the members, ordered the poor creatures to be sent to their homes, without inflicting any punishment upon them."

Dr. Pilgray and his colleagues are now remembered as men who had the courage to speak with sanity and compassion in an era of madness.

During the witchcraft mania, the responsibility for trying and sentencing witches fell to the courts. Inquisitors set to work unearthing witches, and laying down the regular form of trial to discover the guilty. The ultimate result was to debase

the courts to which the proceedings were relegated. Sir Matthew Hale, noted for his work "Pleas to the Crown," must also be remembered as a judge who presided enthusiastically over the trial of witches, Chief Justice Holt, to whom it fell, between 1694 and 1701, to preside at eleven witchcraft trials, to his credit so charged the juries in the cases before him that in each case the jury exercised its common sense and the verdict was one of acquittal.

When any court is compelled to adjudicate the madness of the moment, it must be debased if it throws itself enthusiastically into the endeavor. With the passage of the new "tough" drug bill, the courts are being told—nay, threatened—that they have been given the resources with which to "do the job," and that it will be their responsibility if they fail. The courts clearly will not make a success of a mean, vengeful, and cruel law. If the drug law fails, it will be because of public revulsion, and not judicial inadequacy.

The madness will pass, but while it lasts, the judicial system will need the goodwill of all who would have it survive this latest exercise in barbarism. (Justice) JAMES J. LEFF
New York, Aug. 29, 1973

The writer, a State Supreme Court justice, is Conservative party candidate for Chief Judge, Court of Appeals.

A Mandate Subverted

To the Editor:

With typical defiance, President Nixon proudly informed a group of veterans recently that he had personally authorized the secret bombing of Cambodia in 1969.

Before his re-election last year, he had the lid clamped on his secret and was not boasting about it to anyone. By November 1972, any valid excuse for official silence had long since disappeared, but Nixon knew that he could lose millions of votes if the public discovered that he had ordered a secret attack on the territory of a neutral country. He deprived us all of what we needed to know.

A democracy stumbles when its people are kept in the dark. An incumbent President who deliberately hides his own actions in order to assure re-election is guilty of subverting the people's mandate. This is high crime and warrants impeachment.

WILLIAM C. ATWATER
Brookfield Center, Conn., Aug. 26, 1973

'Programs That Lay Eggs'

To the Editor:

The story about science teachers dropping eggs to illustrate that they do indeed fall is a marvelous commentary on the National Science

Foundation's new wave in science teacher in-service courses (institutes). Up until this year the N.S.F. funded institutes in science content. Science teachers went to various institutions to learn new techniques in science and/or to brush up on areas with which they had lost contact. Now N.S.F. has decided that science teachers know it all and they should learn methods.

Teaching methods is like teaching a horse to swim. The basic aptitude is already there; the style may be improved. Egg-dropping, while a flash in the pan, is a prime example of "let's get the brats listening and cram some science in while they aren't looking." This is neither method nor content. The best way to prepare a teacher to teach is to make sure that he or she knows the subject, and no amount of cute demonstration is going to make someone who is basically weak in physics a good teacher of physics, no matter how many "interesting" devices for attention-getting he brings in. It is unfortunate that many people who supervise science teaching are still of the opinion that "he who doesn't demonstrate is stagnant."

Poor N.S.F. The science is fast disappearing and the foundation is crumbling. When is it going to stop funding programs that lay eggs?

BARBARA CHARTON
Brooklyn, Aug. 22, 1973

Add a Deck to Our Buses

To the Editor:

The "Culture Bus" route inaugurated by the M.T.A. is a bold concept, and I hope it will be a success.

I should also like the M.T.A. to consider putting back double-decker buses on some of its regular routes. Having recently spent a vacation in England and Ireland, I have experienced the delights of viewing the scenes in London, Dublin, and Galway from the top of a double-decker. A most civilized way of travel.

JOHN F. EICHENBERGER
Kew Gardens, N. Y., Aug. 30, 1973

Imperiled Hall of Fame?

To the Editor:

The Hall of Fame for Great Americans and the Gould Memorial Library have not, so far as I know, been mentioned in connection with the disposal by New York University of its University Heights campus.

These architectural gems, of worldwide renown, were the product of architectural genius and of the inspiration and resourcefulness of Chancellor Henry Mitchell MacCracken, the prominent educator who headed New York University at the turn of the century. As an undergraduate at the Heights soon after Dr. MacCracken retired to become Chancellor Emeritus, I had an opportunity to learn something of their history.

The matter of their disposition should be one of considerable public interest, and merits attention. Many of the proliferating other "halls of fame" one reads about are merely exploiters of Dr. MacCracken's glorious concept. It is well to call attention to the valid original and its mission to accord worthy recognition to outstanding exemplars of our unique America and symbols of its opportunities.

The fate of these significant architectural gems should be one of wide interest and concern.

VICTOR HOUSE
San Juan, P. R., Aug. 27, 1973

The Synthetic-Gas Story

To the Editor:

From 1933 to 1938 I worked as economist for the Deutsche Gasolin A.G. in Berlin. We sold the Leuna gasoline the Aug. 26 letter "Gasoline from Coal" referred to through a network of service stations that covered Germany. Whatever amount we could not dispose of was taken over by Shell and Standard Oil, who owned 24.5 per cent each of the shares of the company; I. G. Farben owned the rest.

Leuna gasoline was the product of a hydrogenation process. With the help of a catalyst this process turned lignite under high pressure and temperature into a gasoline fully competitive with that produced from crude oil. A high duty on imported gasoline took care of the high cost of the hydrogenation process.

At the same time, a company in the Ruhr District produced synthetic gasoline from coal tar. The process used was similar to the one used by Leuna and bore the names of its inventors, Fischer and Dropsch.

The statement by your Aug. 26 correspondent, Mr. Oppenheimer, that Germany "never had a single oil well" is, however, incorrect. Oil was produced from several wells in northwestern Germany, though it was mainly used for making lubricating oils.

In 1935 or 1936 I wrote an article entitled "One Day They Will All Hydrogenate," a prophecy which still might be fulfilled.

HEINRICH E. KROMAYER
Caldwell, N. J., Aug. 27, 1973