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Formation and Development of the Union

For the first time more general public attention was given to drivers' temperance and to temperance in connection with traffic problems in general, when in 1936 the parole was adopted for the temperance week: total abstinence—safety of traffic. This parole could, however, not yet persuade the drivers to take any particular steps among themselves.

In connection with the 22nd international temperance congress, held in Helsinki 1939, the matter was again brought up and it advanced so far that a committee was elected for its promotion. The development was unfortunately disturbed by the winter war and the plans could not be realized.

After the war the matter was again brought up in 1945, with the result that an own temperance organization for drivers was founded towards the end of the year. The purpose of this Union is now to fight against alcohol consumption among drivers, to educate its members, and to promote safety of traffic in general.

For this purpose, the Union

1) arranges lectures, courses, meetings and festivals;

2) publishes journals and literature, performs temperance advertising, and carries on publishing and business activity;

3) furthers such legislative measures, as will promote sober traffic and traffic culture in general, and

4) serves as bond of union between such organizations of motorists, as aim to sober traffic.

Although the activity of the Union is of relatively recent date and rather modest as to its outer frame, we are content with the reception it has been given from the side of different motor and traffic organizations. In collaboration with the said organizations educational work has been performed, which certainly has been of good effect. Originally the statutes only admitted as members abstinent persons, who were in possession of a driving licence. In 1947, on the first meeting of delegates, the definition of membership was brought under discussion. A modification of the statutes was then adopted, according to which also such organizations and local sections of motorists as will elect a temperance committee and accept the parole "sober at the wheel" to be observed among their members, can join the Union of Temperance Drivers as community members. Besides this, the Union of course has own local sections with abstinent members only. At present the Union comprises 47 local sections, with a total membership of 3,450 drivers.

Activity

In the activity of the Union two main points may be observed:

1) educational and information work among drivers, and
2) making of proposals to State authorities and taking of initiatives to steps aiming at promotion of sober traffic.

I. Lectures.

Public information occasions are yearly arranged by the Union in different parts of the country, in great centres especially. The program of these gatherings generally comprise two or three lectures dealing with temperance and some special question of motorism, and suitable film shows. Representatives of the domain are invited to these gatherings by distributing invitation letters either personally or through shops of the motor branch. On these occasions also the police and traffic authorities of the place have spoken, on local questions especially. In this way the gatherings are rendered more interesting to the motorists, and the public success secured.

Moreover the Union has arranged lecturing at the conferences of different traffic organizations, at meetings and courses of motorist organizations, at courses for temperance information, and at deliberating occasions arranged for the transport staff of large business establishments. In this way the Union has gained contact with rather wide circles.

II. Film shows.

This kind of activity has gained importance:

a) In cinema theatres the Union arranges film shows, to which the participants are invited by special invitation cards distributed to petrol stations, motor schools, business companies, taxi stands and bus stations. Films dealing with traffic and temperance, and with safety of traffic in general, are shown and the program comprises moreover a short lecture on this theme. These shows have gained popularity with the motorists, and we cannot belittle their influence in creating a public opinion favourable to sober traffic.

b) for cinema theatres have been procured diapositive plates with suitable motifs. The cinemas have utilized such plates during special temperance and traffic weeks.

c) lately also film strips projectors have been taken into use, and some film strips, with topics about traffic and temperance have been produced. Such have been utilized on several information occasions.

The Union is actually planning a film, which shall treat of traffic problems from the temperance point of view.

III. Other propaganda and information work.

1. Placards and pamphlets.

For traffic and temperance weeks the Union has published placards, presenting the significance of sober driving in words and pictures. The placards have been distributed through the mediation of different motor organizations, temperance boards and traffic committees. In towns and other centres great boards have been prepared, on which the placards have been posted, or also high pillars on which adequate pictures and slogans have been painted. For gumming on to cars the Union has produced small slips of paper with the slogan "sober at the wheel" printed on. In connection with motor races posters have also been exhibited.

Further, the Union has published different pamphlets and summaries of investigations regarding alcohol problems, carried out in Sweden and elsewhere, to be distributed among motorists.
2. Journals and periodicals.

The Union provides matrices, articles, interviews and reports concerning safety of traffic. The motorist journals have generously given space at our disposal. The daily papers have also published articles emanating from the Union.


Through the Finnish broadcasting organization the Union has had opportunity to bring temperance questions before the public, in form of interviews, discussions and lectures.

IV. Collaboration with other organizations.

The Union co-operates with several traffic organizations and committees, in which it also is represented. Especially close co-operation is got with the traffic section of the Accident Prevention Association. The said section also has a temperance subdivision, working for promotion of traffic safety and of work-place in general.

V. School and propaganda for sober traffic.

Propaganda in schools is carried out by Temperance Union of Secondary School Pupils and by the Temperance Union of Teachers. The former has e.g. arranged competition in writing themes about traffic and temperance. The latter Union arranged this year, as customary, a writing competition with about 200,000 elementary school pupils. The preparatory booklets contained a special chapter dealing with the influence of alcohol on driving capacity and on precision work in general. The propaganda has thus reached wide circles of young people.

Besides the organizations already mentioned, there are still other societies making efforts in this direction. Rather important is e.g. the Temperance Society of Railways Employees, working among the railway staff for safe and sober traffic.

Actions of principle

From the side of abstinent drivers several propositions have been made to the administrative organs concerned. To the Ministry of Communications it has been proposed, that greater attention should be paid to the schooling of drivers and to the sobriety of motor school pupils. It has also been suggested that an examination should be required from motor school pupils, comprising explanation of the alcohol influence on the intellectual and physical functions of man. The Union has demanded punishment of such persons, as offer intoxicating drinks to a driver executing a driving commission. Several times propositions have been made to sharpen punishments for intoxicated drivers and to regard driving in a state of intoxication as punishable, even if no damage was brought about. The executive committee of the Union has publicly emphasized that alcohol consumption, even of small amounts, always endangers safety of traffic. This statement has been supported by scientific investigations performed in different countries. There is however no need to report on such investigations in this article.

The investigations both in Finland and abroad have moreover proved that alcohol cases generally are more pernicious than others. The fatal cases very often are due to alcohol consumption. According to investigations in Finland the alcohol cases have mostly occurred during the rising
phase of intoxication, i.e. about 1-1 1/2 hours after the taking of liquor.

While planning legislative measures in order to prevent traffic accidents due to alcohol intoxication, one must emphasize that the driver should be completely sober when taking the wheel. And in all cases the driver should avoid taking the wheel before about two hours have elapsed from the end of consumption.

On this basis the blood alcohol percentage committee appointed by the Finnish government in 1949 has founded its proposals. According to these the driving of a motor vehicle in a state of intoxication is prohibited. This clause is transgressed by any one taking the wheel before two hours have elapsed from the end of consumption. A sufficient proof is that the blood test shows a rise no matter how small of the alcohol percentage. If in a later phase the blood alcohol during the drive has risen over 1 o/oo, it suffices to prove the state of intoxication.

The limit of 1 o/oo must be considered rather indulgent, as the investigations have proved the influence of alcohol to begin at 0.2—0.4 o/oo already, i.e. lower than previously presumed. In order not to infringe appropriate legal security the Finnish committee has, however, proposed the limit of 1 o/oo.

The total number of road traffic accidents due to alcohol influence in Finland 1948 was 758. Of them 87 had a fatal issue, 286 cases lead to bodily injuries and 385 to damage of property. The corresponding number for 1949 was 773. In these cases 102 persons were killed, 438 persons were injured, and 580 cases involved damage of property. Of all fatal issues the alcohol cases formed 30.9%, and the injured 15.6%. These recent statistics thus show the alcohol cases to have been more pernicious as to their consequences, than other road traffic accidents. The cause of the accident has been procured intentionally, and could thus have been avoided. If further the chief guilt in alcohol cases is investigated, we see on basis of the statistics for 1949 that 475 drivers of motorcar or motorcycle, 117 cyclists, 64 horsemen (carters), 103 pedestrians, 13 motorcar passengers, and 1 tramcar passenger were deemed to bear the chief responsibility. The change in the Finnish law on motor vehicles, recently adopted by the Finnish Diet must consequently be considered appropriate and not too strong.

Only in theory it may be thought that all road traffic accidents could be avoided. Unfortunately it is impossible for men to reach perfection. Therefore we must content ourselves with the hypothesis, that the number of accidents can be reduced to the minimum unavoidable. In all probability this minimum is however very much less than the actual number. Especially there are certain accidents, which in such an extent are due to the persons involved, that the accidents can be avoided, provided the persons themselves can be prevailed upon. Of such kind are certainly the so called alcohol cases.

Every citizen conscious of his responsibility should further the activity, the aim of which is to eliminate alcohol from traffic. It is to be hoped that the resolutions of this conference and the resulting measures in different countries will lead the development in a better direction. A great step towards greater social security of the individual is thereby taken.

On behalf of the Finnish abstinent drivers we present the most reverent thanks to those who have taken the initiative to this conference and to its organizers.