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Max J. Pollet

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IDEAS WE HAVE USED IN NEW YORK STATE TO PROMOTE AVIATION*

MAX J. POLLET†

In January, 1935, a bill was introduced in the Senate of the State of New York regulating aviation in the state and listing the taxes which would be levied on the industry in order to meet the cost of the state regulating commission which was to be established by the bill. This bill was introduced under the guise of the "Uniform State Aeronautics Act."

This bill created such a furor among those in aviation in the State of New York that representatives from all over the state appeared at a hearing in Albany and emphatically denounced the bill as one that would not only drive most of the aviators out of the state but would bankrupt the aviation industries that remained.

The objections to the bill were numerous—the primary ones being:

1. That the "Uniform" bill gave each state the power to make its own regulations, allowing conflict contrary to the intent of the bill.
2. That licensing of ships and pilots by state inspectors would conflict with the work being done by the Federal inspectors and cause confusion in the minds of all concerned.
3. That the licensing of airports which must have runways at least 3,500 feet long and 500 feet wide was out of the question as only one airport of this size existed in the state.
4. That the requirements for the commissioner and directors were such that a highly technical industry would be supervised by a group of men who knew practically nothing about the activity over which they would have control.

Because of the active opposition of the representatives from the industry in the state, this piece of legislation was defeated for the time being.

Bringing these men together in Albany provided an opportunity for discussion and brought about the birth of the New York State Aviation Association. To George Orr, president of Roose-

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† President of the New York State Aviation Association.

velt Field at that time, goes most of the credit for the formation of the organization and the drafting of the resolutions and by-laws which were later adopted. With the election of officers and directors at the first annual meeting in Albany, New York, on January 16, 1936, the organization began to function.

The mechanics of the organization are simple. Anyone earning or spending money in aviation can be a member. This offers an opportunity for expression not only to the pilot or operator but also to passengers and those interested in this new industry. The association is a non-profit organization and has no salaried employees. The dues are one dollar per year. The object of the Association is to protect and promote aviation in the State of New York.

There are three officers who handle the routine work of the organization. The state is divided into nine districts with a director at the head of each district. These directors and the three officers make up the executive board. The districts are divided into chapters that are under the supervision of a chapter chairman. The chapters can have meetings as often as they desire but there is only one regular meeting of the Association each year. Chapter chairmen are elected by the chapter members. The directors are elected by the members in their respective districts. The officers are elected by the entire membership. In order to eliminate any possibility of controlling the election, each chapter is allowed one vote and an additional vote for each twenty-five members in the chapter.

At the end of the fiscal year 1937, the New York State Aviation Association had 2,453 members divided into 43 chapters with members from 310 different communities in the state. Seventy-eight per cent of the members are either commercial pilots, private or student flyers, or else actively engaged in other phases of the aviation industry in the state.

Just what is the line of thought that dominates the Association? We feel that the industry is not ready for taxation. That the surest way of retarding its development is to put a tax on gasoline, on licenses for ships, pilots, schools and airports, and by landing fees. A study of the financial statements of all but a few of the airplane manufacturing concerns and of all the operating companies, whether transport or private or schools or repair shops, shows that not one is yet on a sound financial basis but that all have been through years of losses and are struggling to get to the point where they can break even. We feel that it is not consistent with good government

to tax such a small minority—in New York State we have 1,547 pilots out of some *ten million* people.

We feel that the Department of Commerce can ably enforce regulations and that the state should enact laws, such as those on the statute books of the State of New York, which authorize the local law authorities (in this case the New York State Police) to enforce the regulations established by the Department of Commerce. We realize that there is some question as to the constitutionality of such action but we believe that the answer is not in setting up new laws for each state but in devising some means whereby each state can have exactly the same law and have it enforced by the same group of officials.

We believe that what is needed is promotional activity by the states; establishing commissions which will develop aviation by getting more people flying; by establishing additional airports and by dispensing information to communities and individuals which will enable them to satisfactorily carry on a plan of aviation development. We believe that the cost of such development should, at this time, be carried by all of the people in the state. That aviation should be fostered and subsidized as have been other industries which provided for the general welfare and protection of all the people. We believe that it is absolutely essential that the majority of those serving on state or federal aviation commissions should come from the ranks of the flyers or those actively engaged in the industry.

We believe that private flying should be nurtured and fostered just as transport aviation has been by the Federal Government. The sound growth of aviation depends on private flying; on getting the average individual into the air; on making the airplane a common means of transportation.

We believe that federal legislation such as the McCarran-Lea Bill is for the general benefit of aviation and that the sooner such legislation is put into effect, taking aviation out of politics, the better for the sound growth of aviation.

We believe that the one cent federal gas tax should be turned back to the airports on which the gas was sold in order to give local municipalities additional assistance to make ends meet.

We believe that it is time the Federal Government took some steps in aiding local municipalities in carrying the burden of airport expense. Airports are both local and national in character, as are our inland harbors, and the same consideration should be given to both.

We believe that aviation is not a political football but an industry which is of commercial value in time of peace and a protection in time of war.

Now what have we done in the state to justify our existence? We have brought aviation to 310 communities in the State of New York. Each month persons in these communities receive a bulletin on what is going on in aviation. During the legislative session the members are kept informed of aviation bills that have been introduced and are asked to take some action on these bills with their local representative to the Legislature.

The 43 chapters meet from time to time to discuss legislation, new phases of aviation, aviation activities in the local community, as well as to plan means for additional aviation activity in the area. In some areas these groups have been able to promote airport WPA projects—thus opening up new airports. In one group four new members who have never before been associated with flying have started their flying training and one of these four has bought a ship. In one small community the activities of this group brought about the installation of a federal emergency field. This group is now seeking the installation of a radio marker beacon.

Due to the activity of the State Aviation Association many of the legislators have become educated in aviation matters and hence are better able to properly analyze the state aviation bills which are presented for their action. In 1937 the Association drew up a Promotional State Aviation Commission Bill which would have done much to develop aviation in the State of New York if it had become law. The bill passed the Senate and the Assembly only to be vetoed by the Governor.

This year the Association embarked on an air marking program in cooperation with the Department of Commerce. At this writing 102 signs have been erected in the state and an additional program prepared for the 1938 season.

We have acted as the clearing house for aeronautical information. Working in close cooperation with the Airport WPA director we have aided communities in promoting airport projects; have provided speakers on aviation for high school and luncheon clubs; have aided in the operation of air meets and have taken an active part in any activity which had to do with the furtherance of aviation in the State of New York.

We have set up an arrangement with one of the larger gasoline companies whereby 87 octane gasoline will be made available at even the smallest airports in the state. This will be of help not

only to the private flyer but to the transport and military services as well.

The action of the Association has saved airports from condemnation proceedings by the state. When a decision had been reached to condemn an airport because it was directly in the way of a new proposed highway—presenting the importance of the field to those who travel by air instead of by road saved the airport.

We are now working on a program to have some aviation courses included in all high school curriculums. We feel that the enthusiasm of youth for aviation should not be lost sight of but should be fostered and properly directed.

We are now preparing, for distribution to the state municipalities, what we believe should be the requirements for the position of airport manager. These requirements stress aeronautical experience as well as good sound business judgment.

During the past two years we have supplied the newspapers with articles on aviation. We have supplied the aviation magazines with articles on our activities and have aided other states in the establishment of similar state organizations.

That we have brought together persons in aviation from all over the state and formed one unit to actively promote aviation activity is of major importance. That we have established an aviation organization which is now in its third year of existence with a constantly growing membership must mean that the Association has value. Similar organizations in other states can do much to solve aviation problems and bring about greater aviation activity and a better understanding of our problems throughout the country.