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OPINIONS ON PROPOSITION 17 TRAIN CREW MEASURE NOT JELLED

by Mervin D. Field

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Public opinion has not yet jelled on Proposition 17, the "Railroad Train Crew" initiative measure.

The latest California Poll survey finds that the largest number of people have not made up their mind on this issue, and many who offer an opinion at this time are thinking about it for the first time.

A cross section of over 1200 voters throughout the state was interviewed during the first week in September. Each was shown a copy of the measure exactly as it will appear on the ballot. The trained opinion interviewers then asked: "If you were voting today, would you approve or disapprove of this measure?"

Results of today's opinion sounding, compared with those of a similar sounding made in April of this year, show that while there has been a slight increase in the "No" vote, the most significant finding is that the largest single segment of the public still has yet to make up its mind on this issue.

On Proposition 17 would vote:

Yes
No
No opinion

	<u>September</u>	<u>April</u>
Yes	32%	31%
No	27	22
No opinion	41	47

(MORE)

The California Poll was founded in 1946 as a medium for promoting public opinion research. The California Poll is completely independent of all political parties and candidates. Its sole purpose is to report public opinion accurately and objectively. Most of the financial support for the Poll comes from newspapers and television stations that have exclusive rights within the city of publication. The Poll utilizes accepted scientific sampling and questioning procedures in obtaining the data reported in its releases. Representative samples of adults are interviewed at periodic intervals on election issues and other socially important questions of the day. Proportionate numbers of people of both sexes, from all parts of the state, from different sized communities, and of all age, economic, political, and occupation groups are included in the samples. Major surveys are made with samples of 1,200 or more respondents. Interim surveys sometimes are made with smaller samples but not less than 600 interviews.

The California public had an opportunity to vote on a similar issue in 1948. At that time an initiative measure was passed by less than 2 percentage points that empowered the State Public Utilities Commission to set the number of brakemen to be used on railroad trains.

At the heart of contention over this proposition is the issue of "featherbedding" vs. safety. There have been recent federal rulings which would permit railroads to cut the size of crews on diesel freight trains. Present union rules and California law calls for the presence of firemen and certain other personnel.

The railroads maintain that modern diesel ^{freight} ~~freight~~ trains require fewer men to operate and that "featherbedding" adds to operating costs. However, spokesmen for the railroad unions have argued that extra men in the cab and other places are necessary for safety. Eliminating these men would increase the danger of accidents, they say.

Although battle lines in the present Proposition 17 fight seem to be drawn over the issue of efficiency vs. safety, the ultimate question is the deeper one of automation. Many industries besides railroads are being affected by the advent of new machines that produce more work with less manpower. The problem which must be solved is how to create productive and worthwhile jobs for displaced workers and for the hundreds of thousands of new workers entering the job market each year.

If past struggles are any indication, the campaigns for and against Proposition 17 will be fought very hard because the issues are important ones. So important, in fact, that regardless of how this election turns out the question of automation and jobs will remain one of the central problems of our time.