FIGHTING AGAINST PRIVATE CAR INVASION….IN 1896

Posted on 18/04/2012 by Naider

The Call

SAN FRANCISCO BICYCLE RIDERS AS DISCIPLES OF PROGRESS.

Some weeks ago I came across a great story in The Urban Country blog. The photograph shows the front cover of the San Francisco Call, headlining a demonstration of thousands of protesters -more than 100.000 according to the newspaper- who gathered to protest against what started to be an excessive presence of private cars in the streets of this Californian city. I am not an expert on **critical mass** demonstrations nor on the urban cycling movement, but this figure seems to be a huge number. What is fascinating here is that, in those days, private car was still in the first stages of its domination of streets but, even though, people were already feeling it was gaining too much space and too many privileges in urban design. Of course, the historical context of this episode might be more complex but it seems a good story to understand how it all began in our history of private car supremacy. You can read more details on the story in *The Great Bicycle Protest of 1896*.

The *Great Bicycle Demonstration* intended to gain attention of the demands for more security and asking for bicycles to be considered also in the repavement of Market Street, on of the main arteries of the city. For sure, this may be one of the very first parades of bicyclists, in a time when riders were starting a social movement in main cities across the country. Seen in perspective, this could be considered one of the first signs that the growing presence of automobiles was creating unknown conflicts and perceptions in urban life.

The demonstration meant to defend the role of bicycles as an ideal way for urban transport that was rediscovered in the second part of the XIX century and became very popular while it had to find its own place when other modes of transport like trams and horse carriages were already established and had their own infrastructures and regulations. The G**ood Roads movement** was trying to dignify roads and streets to make them more secure and accessible for all choices of urban mobility. However, bicycles were losing the battle as they were considered to be outsiders that would be better removed from circulation. After all, bicycles were so popular and were crowding the roads and starting to create problems of coexistence. More or less, the picture then could be similar to a rush hour in Copenhagen today:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=FXw_t172BKY

Since then, a whole century dominated by the prominence of private cars in urban design and the way most cities have been developed. The great mistake of the autocentric urban development. One century later, we are coming back to bicycles as a new trend. Then there was the Good Roads movement and now we have the **Complete Streets movement**, an urban design approach to secure more equality and balance among those who move and live in cities.

See also:

- *La expansión de la bicicleta en las ciudades españolas*
- Visualización de datos urbanos. Londres en taxi, bici y bus
- *El futuro de las ciudades. Bike-sharing*
- *Jan Gehl, la ciudad de las personas. Janette Sadik-Khan, liderazgo para hacerla posible*
- *3-Way Street. Un cruce de calles y los pequeños detalles*
- *Daily scenes in an intelligent city*
- *The intelligence of a city is on the streets*
- *The time of the temporary city*
- *Melbourne laneways. Every space matters*

There are no comments yet.