

TRADE WITH RUSSIA

On the Orders of the Day:

Hon. CHARLES MURPHY (Russell): Mr. Speaker, in view of the announcement that a trade agreement has been entered into between the Government of Great Britain and the Soviet Government of Russia, may I inquire if this Government has taken or is about to take any steps to promote trade between Canada and Russia?

Right Hon. Sir GEORGE FOSTER (Minister of Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, no particular steps have been taken of late. The situation as regards Russia and Canada is simply this—that any Russian subject has a perfect right to come to Canada to make purchases and provide for payment to the Canadians from whom he makes purchases; and Canadians have a perfect right to trade with Russian subjects. Notwithstanding the trade commissions that we sent to Russia, conditions in that country entirely apart from general world conditions, are not favourable to Canadian trade; but since the Armistice there has been no embargo on trade relations between the two countries.

Mr. J. H. SINCLAIR (Antigonish and Guysborough): Mr. Speaker, do the terms of the treaty which has been completed between Great Britain and Russia apply to Canada?

Sir GEORGE FOSTER: The treaty between Great Britain and the Soviet authorities has been concluded entirely irrespective of the self-governing dominions.

Mr. MURPHY: May I ask the right hon. gentleman if the conditions in Russia to which he referred militate against Canada to any greater degree than they do against Great Britain?

Sir GEORGE FOSTER: The conditions in Russia are equally unfortunate for both countries. They arise from the confused state of affairs in Russia itself and from the almost complete breakdown of transportation facilities there; those are the special conditions. Then, of course, there is the general trade condition of the world in the matter of exchange and credits.

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS

PRODUCTION OF PAPERS

On the Orders of the Day:

Mr. F. S. CAHILL (Pontiac): Mr. Speaker, I wish to ask the Minister of Railways and Canals (Mr. Reid), in view

of his statement regarding the resolution of the hon. member for Quebec West (Mr. Parent), if it is the policy of the Government that correspondence between the officers of the Canadian National Railways will not be produced in this House when asked for?

Hon. J. D. REID (Minister of Railways and Canals): Mr. Speaker, the answer I gave to the hon. member (Mr. Parent) was that the correspondence he asked for was not in the possession of the Government, and of course I could not produce it.

Mr. CAHILL: I would ask the minister whether he refuses to produce the correspondence? The matter has to do with his department.

Hon. W. S. FIELDING (Shelburne and Queen's): Does my hon. friend mean to imply that transactions relating to the Canadian National railways are not to be brought to the notice of this House, and that an hon. member cannot properly ask, subject to the usual rule regarding confidential matters, to have brought before Parliament any correspondence relating to any public matter in the Dominion of Canada?

Right Hon. ARTHUR MEIGHEN (Prime Minister): This is a subject that has come up very frequently, and the rule adopted by Parliament is, I think, well known. The board of directors of the National railways operate the system just as the board of directors of any other railway whose stock is not owned by the Government operate their system. The correspondence of the board of directors is in the possession of the National Railways, and it has not been the practice that this Government should ask that all matters of operation be submitted to it or to this House for review; they come before the House in the usual way in the annual report of the board of directors. That is the policy which has been adopted and which now prevails.

Mr. FIELDING: Subject to the general rule that confidential documents cannot in the public interest be produced, which we admit readily, does my right hon. friend imply that because the Canadian National Railways take the form of a company, in which the people of Canada are the owners of all the stock, therefore we cannot ask for papers relating to the transactions of that vast enterprise in which the people's money is invested?