

National Control of Railways

In assuming control of the railways of United States a few days ago, President Wilson said:—

"To assume control of the vast railway systems of the country is, I realize, a very great responsibility, but to fail to do so in the existing circumstances would have been a much greater. I assumed the less responsibility rather than the weightier. It is our duty to do everything to secure the complete mobilization of the whole resources of America by as rapid and effective means as can be found. Transportation supplies all the arteries of mobilization. Unless it is under a single and unified direction, the whole process of the nation is embarrassed. It has become unmistakably plain that only under government administration can the entire equipment of the several systems of transportation be fully and unreservedly thrown into a common service without injurious discrimination against particular properties. Only under government administration can an absolutely unrestricted and unembarrassed common use be made of all tracks, terminals, terminal facilities and equipment of every kind. Only under that authority can new terminals be constructed and developed without regard to the requirements or limitations of particular roads.

"It is necessary that the transportation of troops and of war materials, of food and of fuel, and of everything that is necessary for the full mobilization of the energies and resources of the country, should be first considered, but it is clearly in the public interest also that the ordinary activities and the normal industrial and commercial life of the country should be interfered with and dislocated as little as possible, and the public may rest assured that the interest and convenience of the private shipper will be as carefully served and safeguarded as it is possible to serve and safeguard it in the present extraordinary circumstances.

"One of the strong arguments for assuming control of the railroads at this time is the financial argument. It is necessary that the values of railway securities should be justly and fairly protected and that the large financial operations every year necessary in connection with the maintenance, operation and development of the roads should, during the period of the war, be wisely related to the financial operations of the government.

"Our first duty is, of course, to conserve the common interest and the common safety and to make certain that nothing stands in the way of the successful prosecution of the great war for liberty and justice, but it is also an obligation of public conscience and of public honor that the private interests we disturb should be kept safe from unjust injury, and it is of the utmost consequence to the government itself that all great financial operations should be stabilized and co-ordinated with the financial operations of the government. No borrowing should run athwart the borrowings of the federal treasury, and no fundamental industrial values should anywhere be unnecessarily impaired. A great national necessity dictates this action and I was not at liberty to abstain from it."

The government of United States was the only great government now engaged in the war which up to then had not already assumed control of its railroads. The President recommended that the average net railway operating income of the three years ending June 30, 1917, be guaranteed the railways and assured them that the properties would be maintained throughout the period of federal control in as good repair and complete equipment as at present.

Surely this is all the precedent necessary for the Dominion government to assume control of Canadian roads. Every other country has done it. It is exceedingly necessary in Canada.

The railway problem is at a crisis. Government control with the most experienced and ablest railroad men in charge of one great unified system ought to be adopted immediately.

The Labor Problem

The greatest problem facing Western farmers is that of securing enough labor to keep production up to the point at which we are urged it is absolutely essential that it be kept. That will necessitate the services of every available trained man in the country. The withdrawal of so many men has handicapped production all together out of proportion to the number of men taken and the quality of the remaining labor is distinctly inferior to what it was a year or two year's ago. The substitution of women for men in agriculture in the West can be carried on to no appreciable extent, because the women already on the farms, except in rare instances, are doing their utmost and the substitution of the labor of the city women is entirely impractical. Recently a meeting of provincial representatives was held at Regina, where a scheme was evolved which has had the approval of the provincial departments of agriculture and is being submitted to the Federal government. The details of this have not been made public and will not until it has been considered at Ottawa. At the Brandon convention this whole problem was a burning question among both grain growers and livestock men. A large committee from both, after spending much time on it submitted the following resolution which was adopted almost unanimously by a joint meeting of almost 1000. It may be taken as a fair index of the feeling among Western farmers.

"Whereas, the proposition that man cannot fight without food is as indisputable as the proposition that battles cannot be fought without men, and whereas, not only the military forces, but the civilian population of Britain and the European allies are dependent in a large measure upon Canada for adequate supplies of food and whereas, this can only be provided by the most strenuous efforts not only to retain production at the former level but to increase production in a very large measure;

"Resolved that the time has come for the complete mobilization of the man power of the Dominion with a special view to the increases of food production, to this end we recommend—

"(1) The closing of all non-essential businesses and the drafting of men for farm work, who are not engaged in essential occupations

"(2) That all bona fide farmers and farm laborers who have been called under the Military Service Act be immediately returned to the farms and exempted from military service, so long as they remain at such occupations, except that in the cases of large families who have no voluntary contribution to the military forces of the Dominion. For the sake of the moral effect some representatives of these families should be in the army.

"(3) That all available men should immediately be registered with a view of placing them in positions where they may render the most effective service to the nation.

"(4) That a maximum wage should be fixed for competent men and a minimum wage for boys and inexperienced men.

"(5) That there should be an immediate registration of all those engaged in the production of foodstuffs with a view of bringing together employer and employees.

"(6) That for the protection of both employer and employee, their relation should be under the supervision of some competent authority appointed by the government."

This is the most comprehensive resolution that we have seen drafted on the subject. The closing of non-essential businesses should have been done long ago. Why, during times of national peril and food shortage, should the candy and ice cream businesses for example go on wholly unrestrained? Much of the labor supplied by these, however, would probably be better in military work thereby liberating trained agriculturists. The immediate registration of all available men in order to get them in the places of greatest service should have been done long ago. The question of wages is one that should be carefully considered by the government for the conscription of labor would be a most difficult task in this country. The question of labor exchanges which have done much efficient service in Britain and other places should receive careful attention. Their services are equally useful in times of labor shortage or labor surplus and we may have a serious surplus not long after the war. The establishment of such exchanges would make

a permanent contribution of real importance to the solution of this difficult problem.

New Year's honors were thrown around with rather a lavish hand. A large number of Canadians were made Commanders of the Bath, Companions of St. Michael and St. George and Masters of various other things, as well as a good sprinkling of Knights. The farmers, as usual, were overlooked. We would suggest that a good line of titles for the farmers would be Companion of the Binder, Master of the Wheelbarrow or Knight of the Spring Tooth Harrow.

The C.P.R. continues to make big returns on its land sales. For the ten months ending October, 1917, it sold 543,143 acres as compared with 316,796 in the corresponding period of 1915. It has paid no taxes on these lands. The people of Canada have had to do that but the C.P.R. gets the unearned increment.



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