

News from Ottawa

Debate on the Grain Act

By The Guide Special Correspondent.

Ottawa, March 1.—Parliament has had a somewhat strenuous week. Again questions pertaining to the problems which confront the agriculturists of Canada occupied the attention of the House during several of the sittings. The Grain Act, which has been the cause of much cogitation and discussion to-night, is still in the committee stage, but it is practically ready for third reading. All the important clauses have been disposed of and the amendments, whether for better or for worse, are practically upon the statute books of Canada in so far as any rate as it is possible for the Commons to put them there. Whether the Senate will object to the many amendments which have been made to the measure since it was passed by the Upper House last session is still a matter for conjecture.

After about three hours' discussion the amendment providing for sample markets and mixing of grain was put through despite the objections of several members. The amendment in regard to the car supply at the terminals, of which Mr. Foster gave notice some time ago, is now incorporated in the bill. It is a very complicated system which is provided for. If at Fort William demands are made for the transport of grain and the receipts surrendered, the railway company is to comply with these demands, or say whether it will not. If it does not comply with the demands within twenty-four hours, the owners of the receipt can apply to the grain commissioners who will investigate and decide whether or not there is a reasonable ground for complaint, then they shall notify the railway authorities. If the railway authorities do not comply with the request of the board the matter will be submitted to the railway commission.

Monday's session of the House was taken up almost entirely with the bill, the most noteworthy result of the day's labor being the adoption of Mr. Foster's amendment providing for the establishment of sample markets at Fort William, Winnipeg and Calgary with mixing privileges. Previous to this, however, there was an interesting discussion on clause 123 of the bill, which provides that no person owning, managing, or operating a terminal elevator shall be permitted to buy or sell grain in the Western division.

The Government's Intention

Mr. Knowles, of Moose Jaw, proposed an amendment which would make it apply to anyone in any way interested in a terminal elevator and in connection with a somewhat technical discussion thereon Mr. Foster made a further explanation of the government's policy in regard to terminal elevators. As stated last week, it is to be government ownership on a limited and experimental scale. Mr. Foster made this very clear in his second statement to the House. "The government," he said, "undertake to put into operation the principle of government ownership either by construction or leasing, but to what extent the government will go is not yet determined. We may determine in the end to lease one, two or three of the elevators that are there at the present time and thus apply to a certain extent, the principle of government operation and give to the people of the West a choice between the elevators at that point that are run by corporations or individuals or the elevators that are run by the government, either as owners or lessees. I am not going to say on behalf of the government that we propose to lease all the terminal elevators there, or that we propose to take absolute charge of all for the present year. I am going to say that we do not. We may lease two of these elevators, we may lease three of them, but we do not intend to undertake the financial or experimental responsibility of taking the whole terminal elevator system at Fort William and Port Arthur under government operation for the present. We propose to apply the principle and to undertake the experiment to see whether or not the claim on behalf of that peculiar type of operation is well founded. If it works out well it will

be for the government and this House, if they think it wise to apply the principle still further, but I want to guard against it being stated that because this much has been done the government proposes to take the whole of the terminal elevators under government operation. In so far as the government leases some of these elevators the separation is absolutely made. In so far as it does not lease them it has this hold over the others that remain not leased by the government that it has the absolute right of saying what persons shall be allowed to operate them. That is to be done with the approval of the board and with the subsequent approval of the government. In that way you have a hold over that class of elevators that you never had before. Heretofore, we have simply had supervision. After this act is passed we will not only have supervision, but we will also have the power of direction. If those who propose to run these elevators should own them their management has to be satisfactory to the government. In that way it seems to me that we get a hold added to the supervision that we already have and that we propose to maintain and we get these elevators on the basis of absolutely straightforward and honest work. That is all that the West asks and that is all that any section should ask. The demand of the West is that the grain should not be manipulated at the terminals. It does not matter a pin as to how that is brought about so that the thing itself is accomplished."

Proceeding Mr. Foster said he had little use for the man who believed that he alone knew how a thing should be done. He also expressed the belief that there had not been any wrongful manipulation of grain at the terminal elevators during the grain seasons of 1910 and 1911.

Sample Markets

When Mr. Foster's amendment authorizing the establishment of sample markets at Fort William, Winnipeg and Calgary was taken up the minister went into a lengthy explanation of the modus operandi of such markets and expressed the view that they would work out to the advantage of the farmers and the trade generally.

Hon. Frank Oliver was not so sure about it. In his judgment an effort was being made under the guise of a sample market to secure unlimited rights for mixing grain for export, something which is entirely contrary to the present principles of handling grain. There could be no objection, he said, to a sample market if there is a demand for the grain which can handle it without requiring it to be graded or to go through the channels of transportation. Then undoubtedly the farmer would get a truer value for his grain, but that can only apply in so far as there is a consuming market within range. Mr. Oliver asked at this point if the mixing privileges contemplated in the bill would apply to grain for export quite as much as to the grain for home consumption.

"They apply generally," said Mr. Foster in reply.

Mr. Oliver said that when the minister gave notice of his amendment he wired Mr. McKenzie, secretary of the Grain Growers' association of Manitoba, asking his opinion of the amendment. His reply was:

"Suggested amendment positively no value to Western farmers. Opposed utterly by our association. Ostensibly to establish sample market, effect will be to enable few private individuals to make immense profits out of second class grain at expense of reputation of standard grades, with no advantage to farmers. Conditions essential to establish sample market at Winnipeg, involve making Winnipeg an order point, and sending samples from points west of Winnipeg in advance of cars, as in Minneapolis, and equal opportunity to all dealers to have identity of grain purchased on sample preserved at terminals." Mr. Oliver after quoting the report of the editor of The Grain Growers' Guide on the Minneapolis sample market and the conditions under which a similar market could be profitably established in Win-

nipeg, reaffirmed his position that the mixing of grain for export would be a detriment to the good farmer inasmuch as he would not be getting the grade for the higher quality of grain that he produced.

Mr. Meighen's Views

Mr. Arthur Meighen on the other hand expressed the conviction that the establishment of a sample market would dispose of practically all the difficulties under which the grain trade suffers. He regretted that the officers of the Grain Growers' association cannot at the present time see their way to approve of the establishment of such markets. On this subject he thought he was closely in touch with the farmers of his constituency. During the election campaign he had met thousands of them and they were favorable to the establishment of sample markets. It was only lately that he had learned that the officers of the association are opposed to them. Mr. Meighen argued that the man who is buying by sample could get the benefit of the mixing privilege, and he would as a consequence pay a much higher price, and the man who is buying by grade has to meet this price in order to get the grain. He was certain that the sample market proposal would be welcomed by the farmers of his constituency as well as by the farmers of other districts throughout Western Canada.

On Wednesday afternoon and evening there was a somewhat strenuous debate on the Western car blockade which was concluded with a couple of whirlwind speeches by Hon. Geo. E. Foster and Dr. Michael Clark, of Red Deer, who is fast coming to be regarded as the chief antagonist of the minister of trade and commerce in the House, although they are good friends personally.

The debate was started by Mr. Oliver, who moved a somewhat lengthy resolution, which, after expressing satisfaction that rates on grain to Duluth and Minneapolis had been secured on the same basis as the Fort William rate, went on to urge upon the government the advisability of securing further consideration of the matter by the railway companies with a view to having the reduced rates apply to wheat and oats for grinding in bond and for consumption in the United States as well as for export.

"The House would further urge that such means as may be practicable be taken by the government to have the through rates on barley and flax to Duluth and Minneapolis which became effective on Jan. 23 reduced to the Fort William rate."

The ex-minister of the interior after dealing minutely with the blockade conditions and their cause, estimated that the total loss to the Western farmers this season from natural and other cause was fifty-one million dollars or practically fifty per cent. of the crop value. He estimated the loss on wheat owing to blockade conditions at eight millions and on other grains at two millions. Mr. Oliver blamed the government to a large degree for the existing conditions and said that earlier action should have been taken to secure the lower rates to Duluth and Minneapolis.

Blamed Providence

Mr. Foster in reply poked a good deal of fun at the ex-minister of the interior because he had taken so much time to explain to the House how Providence had in the beginning sliced about one-third off the expectations of the West. Then Providence had again intervened in connection with the threatened coal famine which had tied up part of the transportation and still again by supplying six weeks of unprecedented weather. The minister then proceeded to say that he could not see what object was to be gained by advertising to the world the conditions in Western Canada, conditions for which the late government was responsible because of its failure to construct the Winnipeg-Cochrane section of the N.T.R. by the present time. The government, he said, proposed to bend its energies to the settlement of the problems of the West and hoped to solve

them in a satisfactory manner. In conclusion he, for the second time this session, advised Western farmers to go in for mixed farming and for the construction of the necessary grain storage accommodation on their farms.

Dr. Michael Clark regretted the levity with which "his frivolous old friend" had discussed so serious a matter. It was in itself, he said, sufficient justification for the want of confidence motion which had been moved by Mr. Oliver. The problem, he said, was a larger one than the government, apparently, had any conception of and he hoped that the discussion would have the effect of guiding the government to some better conception of it. "What is the problem?" queried the member for Red Deer. "It is the problem of the disposal of the magnificent products of our Western country. It is not a Western problem but a Canadian problem. The moment the West suffers the East suffers in sympathy and the prosperity and wealth of the whole of Canada decline. The position is a worse one, politically, for my hon. friends opposite because we had a plan for the disposal of this produce. That plan has been turned down in the meantime and our function under the constitution of this country is to say to the government. What are your plans? You defeated our plan, it is defeated pro tem. Now what are your plans? This is a serious question for the government, politically, because the responsibility at once comes to their door. The material is being produced, the people are coming this spring, we are told, in greater numbers to fill the homes, till the soil and produce more. The question is still more serious, because if you continue to advertise Canada as a splendid field for immigration and people continue to come in as a result of the advertising carried on, you are, if you do not solve the problem of the disposal of the material these people produce, engaged in a pitiless campaign, and you are in a fair way to making Canada the laughing stock of the world. Dr. Clark then proceeded to show in his logical way that Great Britain can take only two hundred million bushels of wheat annually; that Canada can never hope to secure the monopoly of that market and that in the end the sheer weight of Western production will make it absolutely imperative to secure for the Western farmers the market of the United States. After Mr. Geo. Fowler had indulged in some abuse of Dr. Clark for his views, which he said were all wrong because there is no market in the United States for Canadian wheat, Mr. Oliver's proposal was voted down on a division of eighty-four to fifty-four, a government majority of thirty.

This afternoon the government on a

Special Co-operative Number

A special Co-operative Number of The Guide will be published during the coming spring. Last year we published a Co-operative Number, containing reports of the co-operative buying and selling done by farmers' organizations in the West. These organizations are growing rapidly and we want to tell our readers what they have done during the past year. We would like to have every co-operative society in the West and every farmers' organization that has done any co-operative work send us a full report for publication. Every local association that has bought twine, coal or anything else co-operatively should send us a report for this special number, showing what has been bought, the methods adopted and the saving effected. The same issue will contain articles showing what has been done along co-operative lines by the farmers in Ontario, Minnesota, Wisconsin and California. Send along the reports not later than March 15. Let us make the Co-operative Number a good one.