

WINNIPEG BOARD OF TRADE

CONDEMNS THE DOUGLAS BILL

A meeting of the Winnipeg board of trade, called at the request of the general grain committee of the board, was held on Saturday afternoon, to consider the provisions of the 'act to regulate the trade in grain in Manitoba and the Northwest Territories,' introduced to the house of commons by Dr Douglas, M. P., and now before a special committee of the house at Ottawa.

Mr E. L. Drewry, president of the board, in the chair, briefly stated the object of the meeting, and printed copies of the bill were distributed among those in attendance.

Mr S. A. McGaw denounced the bill as the most absurd proposition ever made in parliament. The elevators west of Fort William had, he said, a capacity for fifteen million bushels of wheat, and they had been erected at a cost of \$2,500,000. To allow every wild-cat speculator who desired to do so to come in and erect a \$300 flat warehouse, would, he maintained, leave the farmers without accommodation during the greater part of the year. If the elevators should be closed on the 1st of September all the rolling stock of all the railways in Canada would be unequal to carrying out the crop; and within a fortnight parliament would be deluged with petitions. He characterized as absurd the statement of Dr. Douglas that only ten per cent of the wheat tributary to Moosomin had been marketed there. Last year 200,000 bushels had been marketed at that point, and it was absurd to say that the amount tributary to Moosomin was 2,000,000 bushels.

Mr. McGaw concluded his speech by making the following motion, which was seconded by Mr. A. M. Nanton:

Whereas the attention of the Winnipeg Board of Trade has been called to a certain bill concerning the grain trade of the country, introduced by the Rev. Dr. Douglas, M. P.,

And whereas this board has fully considered said bill, and has come to the following conclusions, viz.:

1. That it would be impossible to handle the grain of this country in our short market in season before the close of navigation without a system of elevators.

2. That the policy adopted by the railroads of this country has resulted in providing the finest system of elevators in the world, with a total capacity of fifteen million bushels, erected at a cost of \$2,500,000, and contributed largely to the support of the schools and municipal institutions in the localities where erected by way of taxes, and which insure convenience and safety to the producers.

3. That the producers are not bound in any way to sell to the elevator

owners. Their interests are protected by their being able to ship direct on cars without the intervention of any elevator or warehouse.

4. That should the bill now before parliament become law, the proposed restrictions, along with grain chutes and flat warehouses, might render the elevators unprofitable and lead to their being closed down, so restricting the movement of grain that only a small proportion of a year's crop could be handled before the close of navigation at Port William. The loss that would necessarily follow to the various business interests of the country by any such enforced holding of grain in the farmer's hands would be a most serious matter, not only to the business men, but to the farmers as well.

Therefore, be it resolved that this board is of the opinion that the legislation proposed by the Douglas bill is based on a misapprehension of the true needs of the country, and that any enactment on such lines would be ill-advised, as it would seriously interfere with our most important industry.

Mr. Nanton expressed his entire concurrence in Mr. McGaw's opinion. He agreed that it was absurd to allow every Tom, Dick and Harry to erect warehouses and grain chutes which might destroy the investments of the elevator men. He considered that the farmers had protection in that they could ship on cars if they were unwilling to use the elevators. He regarded the appointment of an inspector as one of the most objectionable features of the bill. The bill assumed that the grain men were all sharks; but he found that they had treated the farmers fairly. He objected to the use of flat warehouses, that from these hundreds of tons of dirt would be shipped to Fort William. This, he considered, would be a public calamity. He pointed out the advantage farmers derived from elevators, in that a ticket from a respectable elevator company was as good as a bill of the Bank of Montreal. As these certificates were always negotiable they enabled farmers to hold their crops over if they so desired.

Mr. D. E. Sprague was in thorough sympathy with the motion; he hoped that its adoption would prevent the passage of the ill-advised legislation at Ottawa.

Mr. James Porter said he understood that some of the grain men were in favor of Dr. Douglas' bill, and that the legislature of the Northwest Territories was in full accord with it. He felt that the board was not in a position to reach a decision on this matter after so brief a discussion. He wished that Mr. McGaw had gone into the subject more fully. When there were so many complaints it was generally found that there was some reason for them. He had confidence in the wisdom of the house of commons to deal with the matter, and he held that the whole board were not sufficiently acquainted with the subject to deal with it satisfactorily. He was in favor of the matter being referred to the grain section of the board.

The motion was carried, only Mr. Porter dissenting, and on motion of Mr. F. W. Thompson it was ordered that a copy of the resolution be sent to Hon. Mr. Sifton and a copy to Mr. Eam, the chairman of the special committee to which the bill has been committed.

The resolution passed by the meeting addressed by Mr. McFee, of Montreal, as published at the time in the Free Press was then taken up. The clause relating to the carrying of Canadian grain by American vessels was the one chiefly discussed, several of the speakers expressing the feeling that they had not sufficient information concerning the matter to warrant giving a vote at present. The clause was as follows:

"Be it further resolved that pending the increase of Canadian vessels sufficient for the requirements of the grain trade at Fort William, that U. S. vessels be allowed to load at Fort William for Canadian eastern ports for export."

Mr. Strang moved that the motion pass with the exception of this clause. He did not think that privileges should be accorded the Americans until they were prepared to give something in return.

Mr. Bawlf understood that the proposed arrangement was to be cancelled as soon as there were Canadian vessels enough to carry the grain.

Mr. Muir said that for years the bulk of the trade had been in the hands of American vessels, which had to be unloaded at Buffalo, or some other American port. If this clause were adopted the trade would go by Montreal.

Mr. MacKenzie seconded Mr. Strang's motion.

Mr. Porter contended that the same privileges should be accorded to Canadian vessels, if this concession were made to the Americans. He would support relaxing almost anything towards the United States if they would do the same with us.

Mr. Bole thought the passing of the resolution might embarrass the proceedings of the commission at Washington.

Mr. F. W. Thompson did not believe that the Montreal board of trade had yet passed on the measure and he thought it would be premature for the Winnipeg board to do so under the circumstances.

Mr. Strang expressed his willingness to withdraw his motion in favor of a postponement.

Mr. Drewry called attention to the point that there was danger of important harbor facilities in Montreal passing into the hands of a Buffalo syndicate. The grain exchange, he said, had adopted the resolution in full. He thought that if the matter were dealt with it should be at once.

Mr. Bole moved the postponement of the question for two weeks and suggested that the grain section of the board place their views in print in the hands of the members.

Mr. Nanton seconded this motion, and it was carried in the following form:

"That the discussion be delayed for two weeks, or to a meeting to be called by the president; and that the general grain committee of this board be requested to consider the matter and publish their views, so that members of the board may have an opportunity of learning the facts before being asked to vote on the motion."

The meeting then adjourned.