

News from Ottawa

Will the Grain Commission be Independent?

By The Guide Special Correspondent

Ottawa, Feb. 2.—Many subjects of interest to the Western farmers were discussed in Parliament this week, including the tariff commission, the Grain Bill, the nationalization of telegraph and telephone lines, parcel post, and the distribution of seed grain. The last named topic was introduced by W. M. Martin, Regina, yesterday in the form of a question. He then called attention to the necessity for seed being supplied in some of the most prosperous sections of Saskatchewan. Incidentally the government was asked by Mr. Turiff to warn the farmers of the West that damp or frozen grain is not fit for seed.

Premier Borden announced that Hon. Robert Rogers is considering the seed grain situation and Hon. Martin Burrill supplemented the statement with the declaration that the seed division is dealing with the conditions created by the presence of so much damaged grain.

Telegraphs and Parcels Post

J. E. Armstrong, of Lambton, introduced the question of the nationalization of telegraphs and telephones at the short Wednesday sitting. He was still going strong when the House rose and so there was no opportunity for any member of the government to reply.

W. F. Maclean advocated the extension of the parcel post. He said the result would be to cut the express rates in two within twenty-four hours. A motion by him declaring that the expansion and extension of the parcels post system would be in the public interest was unanimously agreed to. Hon. L. P. Pelletier in discussing the motion said it was the intention of the government to do something along the lines suggested.

Tariff Commission's Functions

The short debate on the resolution which constitutes the preliminary step in the tariff legislation occurred on Tuesday. It served to emphasize the statement so often made that the tariff commission will be a board of experts to collect information for the government and nothing more. Hon. W. T. White, minister of finance, in reply to a number of questions took particular pains to make that clear. When Mr. Macdonald, of Pictou, asked: "Is it the intention to create a body with any power to negotiate with other countries in regard to questions of tariff arrangements?" Mr. White replied: "My conception of the commission is not that it would have any function that belongs to the government, of fixing tariff rates, or negotiating. Its purpose is to furnish information to the government on which the government may act in framing its tariff law or in negotiating. There is one clause in the resolution which says that they may inquire into any other matter or thing in relation to the trade and commerce of Canada which the government sees fit to refer to the commission for inquiry and report. Of course, this is very wide in its terms. It is not in my mind that the commission is intended to negotiate, it is to obtain information on which the government may negotiate or frame its tariff law. I look on the commission as a part of the machinery of government for the purpose of obtaining accurate information."

The minister declined to definitely commit himself when asked by Hon. Rodolphe Lemieux what classes of the community would be represented on the commission. He said that the question of the personnel of the commission had not yet been considered. Mr. White added that his idea was that it would be a mistake either to exclude, or appoint, any man because of his calling. The commission should consist of able, earnest and capable men, commanding the confidence of the entire community; men who would be broad enough to be in sympathy with all classes and interests.

Sir Wilfrid's Observations

Sir Wilfrid Laurier, who said he would reserve his main comments until the bill was under discussion made a few brief observations in reply to a statement made by Mr. White that he (Sir Wilfrid) had in a general way approved the idea of a tariff commission as long ago as 1905. The opposition leader said it was on record that the Manufacturers' Association has, again and again, asked for a tariff commis-

sion. What was in their minds, however, was a tariff commission with much larger powers, and these, he thought, could not be granted. He had always been in favor of a board to collect information. He was not certain that the government's proposals entirely corresponded with the idea he had in his own mind.

Dr. Cash, Liberal member for Mackenzie, raised the question of the amount of publicity to be given to the reports of the commissioners. The discussion which ensued left the matter very much in doubt.

Mr. White laid some emphasis on the necessity for keeping secret information relating to a business which should not be put in the possession of a business rival. The commissioners would report to the government and the information would be available to all members of the House. Secrecy would not be maintained when the inquiry related to a combination in restraint of trade. While admitting the necessity for precautions in certain cases Hon. Frank Oliver took the view that as the people were paying for the commission they should have the benefit of the information collected. The extent to which the information secured by the commissioners will be made public will doubtless be more clearly defined before the bill has gone through all its stages.

The Grain Bill

On Tuesday the House got down to the actual consideration of Hon. Geo. E. Foster's Grain Bill, thirty-seven of the 247 clauses of this voluminous measure being passed in committee. The Minister of Trade and Commerce by way of introduction spoke at some length in explanation of the necessity for the passage of this measure. He sketched with great lucidity everything that has happened in connection with the agitation for improved Grain and Inspection Acts since the commission consisting of Messrs. Miller, McNair and Colby conducted their inquiry and made a report in 1907, down to the conferences of last session and the passage of a bill by the Senate. The present bill, Mr. Foster said, was practically a replica of that bill with a few betterments. He ventured the opinion that at the present time Canada's laws dealing with grain were the best in the world. By this measure they would be still further improved. The minister after pointing out that there are still some points of difference between the various interests connected with the grain trade went on to deal with existing conditions in the West. He spoke practically on the same lines as the week before when dealing with the question of the grain blockade, pointing to the time when more grain routes would be available, and again recommending that the farmers of the West should build barns in which to store their grain.

Naturally the first member of the opposition to speak was Hon. Frank Oliver, who had charge of this self-same measure when Parliament was dissolved in July last. In touching on the transportation aspect of the question he said that those who speak so freely of the shortcomings of the Western farmer in not providing proper housing for his grain would perhaps do well to remember that the rapidity of the progress of the West is due to the fact that it has been possible with a minimum of capital and a maximum of energy to bring under cultivation and into production a maximum area of productive soil. If it had been necessary for the men who went to the Western prairie to provide Eastern barns before starting to farm the total grain production of the West would not now exceed from twenty-five to fifty million bushels. The average settler, he said, had not the means with which to build barns, and besides, the climate being a dry one, they are not necessary.

Powers of the Commissioners

The real fighting ground was not reached, however, until the clauses defining the powers of the grain commissioners were taken up. Mr. Foster in explanation of their functions said: "It will be the aim of the government to get three men who are in the first place honest, in the second place, capable and efficient, and, in the third place, men with executive

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