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"EQUALIZED" RATES NOT EVERYTHING.

Premier Oliver of British Columbia is afraid that the proposed revision of freight rates may leave the westward shipment of grain subject to the same discriminatory charges as at present. That cannot be if the new rates are fixed on a basis of equal charges for equal service. And it was very definitely announced that the governing consideration in the revision is to be the creation of rates which will put all sections of the country on the same footing.

From Edmonton to Ft. William is 1,231 miles. From Edmonton to Vancouver is 769 miles. There is less up-hill haul between Edmonton and Vancouver than between Edmonton and Ft. William. But it costs approximately the same amount to ship a carload of wheat from Edmonton to Vancouver as from Edmonton to Ft. William. The westward movement is thus handicapped by a rate fifty per cent. higher than that over the alternative route, mileage considered.

If equalization of rates means anything at all it must mean the removal of discrepancies such as this. The fact that the Crow's Nest rates are to be preserved on grain going eastward is no barrier to the fixing of westbound rates in proportion. If the Crow's Nest rate is fair to the railways a proportionately lower rate to Vancouver would be equally fair to them. The rate to Ft. William remaining at 15 1-2 cents per bushel of wheat, the rate to Vancouver on an equalized

schedule ought to be something in the neighborhood of ten cents per bushel—against the present rate of fifteen cents.

British Columbia interests do not seem to be concerned about the amount of the freight rates on grain, but only in the relation between westward and eastward rates. Whether the base rate to Ft. William is fifteen cents or twice that, Vancouver seems to suppose that it will get the same amount of Alberta wheat, provided the cost of shipping by that route is made to correspond with the distance the grain has to be hauled. Premier Oliver evidently fears that a fifteen cent rate to Ft. William is lower than it ought to be, and that the Commission may seek to compensate the railways for their small earnings from east-bound traffic by allowing them to collect an undue charge on westbound traffic.

That is substantially what the present rate arrangement has been doing. Under it the farmer whose grain went west was paying a bonus to the railways for hauling grain of other farmers all the way to Ft. William for approximately the same charge. That is obviously unfair. To continue it would be to perpetuate an injustice which grew up in the process of making freight rates off-hand as conditions developed, and without regard to broad principles. The purpose of the proposed revision is to get away from that piecemeal method of dealing with rates and to establish uniformity of charge for the same amount of service.

If that object is to be attained the westward route for prairie grain will not suffer because the Crow's Nest rate to Ft. William is retained, but will benefit. The less it costs to get Alberta wheat to the seaboard the more of it will be grown. And so long as the westward rate is fixed in proportion to the eastward rate Vancouver and other Pacific ports stand to gain because the eastward rate is kept at the present low level. While directly those who have interests at stake in the development of the Pacific ports and routes are interested in having westward rates brought down to two-thirds of whatever the eastward rate is, indirectly they are also involved in the amount of the rates. Wheat is not the only product of the Alberta farm. If the freight rates eat up the profits on that branch of his business the farmer will grow less wheat and produce more stock and dairy products. That would not be to the advantage of British Columbia shipping and port interests, nor of British Columbia agriculture.

What Vancouver and the other Pacific ports should hope for, and work for, is that wheat production shall be the predominant business of the Alberta farmer. The more wheat he raises the more traffic there will be for those ports. The less wheat he can grow at a profit, the more he will be forced into competition with the dairymen and stockmen of the Pacific province. British Columbia should approve the retention of the Crow's Nest rates eastward, and centre its efforts to get correspondingly low rates westward. For if the Crow's Nest rates eastward were abolished and higher rates substituted, the westward rates could not be reduced; and there would be less Alberta wheat next year to go out by either route.

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