

The Car Shortage Problem

Practical Suggestions by F. W. Green

F. W. Green, of Moose Jaw, appeared before the Railway Commission at Calgary, on November 25, and addressed the Commission as follows:

I would like to present to you the present conditions re the car question. Business men as well as farmers are now joining in the universal cry of "car shortage and grain blockade." "Send us cars," "Wheat in millions to exchange for money," are the cries of farmers and business men. The statement of leading officials of the C.N.R. and G.T.P. authorities to the contrary notwithstanding, there is now and is bound to be a great shortage of cars. The combined reports of the railways up to the present have been optimistic. They have 13,000 more box cars and 100 more locomotives on the C.P.R. than last year, and hundreds of miles of double track, beside largely increased terminal capacity at the head of the lakes. The G.T.P. has 3,500,000 bushels more terminal space than last year, fifty new locomotives and thousands of new box cars. The C.N.R. claims 3,500 more box cars than last year, with increased power. We have had the best of weather and every possible opportunity has been given the railroads to show what they can do, and now the elevators are running over in the early part of November. When will Canadians wake up to the possibility of our grain fields?

Listen to the press reports: Regina, Nov. 18—"A million bushels per day passing Regina." Ottawa, Nov. 6—"Canada will export one hundred and four million bushels of wheat this year." Regina, Nov. 5—"Cost of living grows in Regina." Winnipeg Press, Nov. 3—"Grain market all gone to pieces." Saskatoon Press, Nov. 6—"Farmers should buy grain tanks to store their grain." Everything high but what farmers sell, that is a cheap drug.

The tremendous increase in wages and general expense of handling the crop, the decrease in price of the crop, the rush after the early market and the attempt to evade the carrying cost of grain, all tend to intensify and aggravate the condition and take away the farmers' profit. It takes from two to three years of skilful labor of hand and brain, hard work and careful organization, to produce grain. Sixty per cent of what a farmer gets for a bushel of it must go to pay for the various materials used in its production, invested from one to three years at high interest charges before the farmer can offer his labor product on the market in the shape of grain. He has been in contest with the rigors of winters, snow drifts, the summer droughts and excessive rains, excessive heats and killing summer frosts, plunging through mud and blinding dust storms, fears of the hail scourge, fighting weeds, mosquitoes and sand flies. He has begged for credit and has been humiliated either by refusal, duns or threats for interest and repayment. His labor—the red golden wheat or blood-colored flax—is a drug on the market. No one to buy. Simply owing to the inability and insufficiency in this mechanical age of our leading Canadians to devise an adequate plan to take this product off the farmer's hands and give him in return the medium of exchange. At the end of his crop year the farmer, in addition to all his other duties and functions, is asked to be the "Joseph" of the nation and store its food for a year and hand it out to dealers and city bred people as they may demand and the convenience of railways, at what price they may see fit to set upon it.

Farmers Exploited

The system in operation never was devised to serve the farmers satisfactorily. The whole country has been looked upon as a great hunting ground. The farmer has been the game and the speculators or ambitious non-sweatable gamblers, the hunters, regarding the product and the land itself, as well as the administration of our currency system, as their own peculiar preserve.

The method of handling our grain from producer to consumer is one of the most unfair, impracticable, inadequate applications of mechanics or economics possible to conceive; and is only continued because it suits those who live by exploitation, and the credulous ignorant gullibility of the farmers as a class, who continue to permit it. Sharp enough as individuals but absolutely void of organization in defence of their own industry.

We feel that the business end of this grain problem is politics. It centres in legislation. The aggregate result of farmers' operations is a national concern. The welfare of the farmers should be one great object of governmental activity. This matter of the grain bins of Canada is too large and sacred to trust to either individual or corporate control. Dominion Government action is required.

Look for a moment at the condition. There are in the three Western Provinces approximately 132,000 farmers with 2,000 bushels of grain each to ship, total—264,000,000 bushels. We have 2,200 interior elevators with a capacity of 30,000 bushels each, total—66,000,000 bushels. Suppose these elevators have 30 bins each, 66,000 bins, two patrons or farmers for each bin, each having two car loads of 1,000 bushels each. Enough farmers and grain to fill each elevator four times, requiring 264,000 cars to haul it, 7,200 cars per week for nine months. About the end of the third week in September these 132,000 farmers are in open competition with each other for possession of these 66,000 bins. 60 of them struggling around each elevator for the 30 bins therein. Those who secure them first get several cents more per bushel for their grain than others. Suppose you admit arbitration by a car order book, arranging to give them each a car in turn and give them one week to get the car load ready for shipment. Even then it is a contest as to who shall first get the use of bins, which the elevator man must adjust. You talk of a competition which is war and a war which is hell. Here is one all over the country every year. You thus set 66,000 farmers hauling grain to the track at the rate of

66,000 cars per week or 66,000,000 bushels per week. Meantime, if the railways, by the supreme technical skill of elevator men, have managed to haul out during this first week's work, their full capacity, as the best performance, this best of weather with their best equipment this year, namely 1,250 cars per day for seven days during the week, 8,750 cars or 8,750,000 bushels, there would then just be that much available storage space in the elevators to start with on the second Monday morning. (I use the 1,000 unit for convenience, it is approximate).

Now as these 66,000 farmers haul 11,000,000 bushels per day, the railway only hauling 1,250,000 per day, on Monday night of the second week, there would be one million bushels on the farmers' wagons and not a place to unload it, and from this time forward the farmers can only deliver exactly what the railways haul away. They are limited, hedged in and hemmed about with all kinds of inconvenience, uncertainty and suffering in consequence. They have the capacity and the desire to market their product nine times faster than the railways can haul it away. This is the situation and it is plain that no solution will be real that does not remove blockade conditions at internal shipping points and provide the exchange medium and storage.

The problem is a large one and most difficult both in regard to transportation, storage, and financing, and the far reaching effect on the progress of the nation is generally acknowledged.

Now the question is, "How can the initial shipping points be kept clear?" Where is the money to come from—where the grain to be stored? There are various methods advocated such as "Stop bringing in the people," "Put a heavier duty or fine on power tractors on the farms," "Stop the people already here from growing so much grain," "Teach them to feed the grain to hens and go into mixed farming," "Store the grain on the farms," and many other devices from wise heads, many of which may be good in a two-penny show, but people are slow to apply such remedies here. It is quite clear either more grain must be hauled away in the

fall or less offered for shipment, or the strife, with all its concomitant evils, is sure to be continued. To-day not only interior elevators but terminals are full. Not only Canadian but American terminal points are blocked, and what else can we expect? You do not want to eat a year's crop in two months. Store it somewhere someone must, but where is it to be stored, and how?

Internal Storage Elevators

Farmers of the West have for four or five years requested the Dominion Government to take over terminal elevators and operate them as the public bins of the nation. Once they do that, the rest is comparatively easy. A sufficient number of these terminal elevators inland at strategic points convenient for the railways and in close proximity to the grain fields, create new inspection divisions around each; there clean, dry and store under one grading system, one control and, if need be, develop a new financial banking system for the special purpose of operating them, all under control of the Grain Commission. Let progressive Canadians develop around these milling centres where a plentiful supply of wheat is in store.

Unless something like this is done Grain Growers must develop a system of some kind in self defence and when they have done so, and store their own grain, sell their own grain, have control of their own banking system, the Government and the rest of the organized classes in our country may most earnestly desire the opportunity the farmers now offer the Government.

While the Government is developing their plans (and they have commenced) why not attempt to assist the farmer to hold his grain on the farm, to prevent market flooding and transportation congestion?

Sliding Scale of Freight Charges

Asked further by the Chairman of the Commission as to his views for immediate remedy and sample market problems Mr. Green said: Let me point you to some remarks I made in this matter to the Grain Commission in Moose Jaw, August 30, 1912:

To further assist you I would suggest a graded freight rate. Everybody now admits it impracticable to demand of the railways to haul out all the grain in the 70 days between commencement of the shipping season and the close of navigation. The man who does get his grain out has an immense advantage over the man whose grain has perforce to stay behind. Therefore, make it worth his while for a man to keep his grain on the farm rather than worth his while to cheat his neighbor out of his right to a car. There are twelve months in which grain should be hauled instead of 70 days. The average freight rate from this point is about 10 cents per bushel. For grain going out in the first three months, September, October and November, make the freight rate for these three months 12 cents. Those getting the advantage might better pay a lawful extra charge than a bribe. For December, January, February, and March the regular rate of 10 cents to prevail; for April, May, June, July and August, make it 6 cents; railways can haul cheaper in these months. This will encourage the man to provide home storage, which is without doubt the cheapest place to store, but it is more expensive for farmers to haul during the winter and summer than in the fall of the year for various reasons. Then let the Government give a bonus of 2 cents per bushel on all standard grades of grain held on the farm until after May 1, and shipped during April, May, June, July and August. This will in some measure compensate the farmer for the high price paid on lumber to build the bins which have been enhanced by a high tariff. Some are advo-

Continued on Page 22



INNOCENT SUFFERERS OF BALKAN-TURKISH WAR
Greek children orphaned by Turkish bullets waiting for free food at one of the relief stations in Athens