

## Conditions in the West

*The Markets of the Month Have Been Narrow and Without Market Features of any Kind*

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(Special to The Journal of Commerce).

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The price of wheat showed a material drop for the month of February, the decline being 8 cents on No. 1 Northern and 10 cents on No. 2 Northern, while oats have remained almost stationary, the decline being 3 cents for the month. The markets of the month have been generally narrow and without marked features of any kind.

The announcement during the past week of the movement of British shipping to Australia for movement of that crop to Britain, while it apparently had no immediate effect on the market, is nevertheless a significant circumstance. Canadians are beginning to ask, when will our surplus move? That surplus, by the way is larger than was figured on. The Free Press estimate of 175,600,000 bushels made in September last, with a possible 200,000,000 bushels, is now realized to be on the conservative side; there is little doubt that even allowing liberally for the carry over, there will be a full 200,000,000 bushels marketed from the crop of 1916.

To return to transportation, a rather significant thing, which many have passed over without observation, was the decrease in Canadian visible between the week ending February 16th and 23rd. That decrease was nearly two and three quarter million bushels, and where did it occur? In the Canadian stocks in American harbors. Was there any connection between that movement and the recent campaign from Britain for movement.

Conditions are very exceptional with regard to the opening of navigation. In former years it has always been possible to count on a very material movement of grain by boats, before the ore was ready to move, and if the rate was fair, the ore boats, which mainly worked on an appropriation of so much ore to be moved during the season, often made an extra grain trip. This season, however, every ore boat is contracted ahead for every ton it can move from thaw in spring to freeze up next fall and at a price that will mean very high rates for wheat if they consent to move it at all. A 10,000 ton ore cargo under favorable conditions can load in less than two hours, while the best possible speed for a wheat cargo of equal tonnage is 24 to 30 hours, so that the rate would have to be high enough to equalize that delay at both ends on ore.

### TO BE OR NOT TO BE—OLEOMARGARINE.

During the past week oleomargarine has received a deal of attention. While dairy farmers held meetings to express emphatic opposition to allowing oleomargarine to be made or sold in Canada, civic deputations been waiting upon the Minister of Agriculture at Ottawa requesting the removal of the embargo on it.

The Housewives League of Montreal, last week circulated a petition, to be signed by the citizens of Montreal, asking the Government "to repeal the laws prohibiting the sale, manufacture and importation of oleomargarine." At their meeting on Friday last, the Housewives decided to send a delegation to Ottawa to ask the Government to make the use of oleomargarine possible.

Not every butter dealer is in favor of keeping oleomargarine out of the country as is proved by the fact that Mr. R. M. Ballantyne, of Lovell and Christmas, Ltd., is to move a resolution at the next meeting of the Canadian Produce Association in this city asking the Government to rescind the laws prohibiting the sale, manufacture or importation of oleomargarine.

Alderman Ward, of Montreal, who is in the provision business, is in favor of the removal of the restrictions on oleomargarine and says that the reason for the high cost of butter is that there are 2,000,000 fewer milch cows in the country than before the war.

The Ottawa Board of Trade passed a resolution calling upon the Government to permit the manufacture and importation of oleomargarine into Canada as a war measure; the City Council of Montreal endorsed the finding "that the manufacture and

If no boats are available the present outlook for movement of western crop is an extremely blue one. And if all the grain east of the lakes in Canadian and American harbors is to have right of way to seaboard, what ho?

There has been a good deal of discussion on the probable effect of the new regulations as to imports to Britain, but it is considered here that it has no bearing whatever on the policy of production that has been formulated, that it is the part of wisdom and patriotism to go on producing every possible bushel of grain and feed. The labor situation is shaping better than it did last week, though the problem is not solved by any means.

The vexed question of potato supply is still before the people. The high cost of living commission thought they had disposed of the matter when they had a few dealers before them who stated that there was at least three millions bushels of potatoes in Manitoba alone, and that at least 2,000 cars could be shipped out in safety. The press offered a few figures based on consumption and seed requirements that put a new phase on the matter and the commission have tackled it again. One of the difficulties in arriving at a correct estimate is the wide discrepancy between the Dominion and Provincial figures on the acreages seeded to potatoes last year. In Manitoba, for example, the discrepancy is more than fifty per cent. There is no authoritative means of finding out supplies. Many dealers swear there is an abundance, others equally in a position to know are asking for an embargo and in the meantime potatoes are going south at the rate of 20 cars per day.

The local price in ten bushel lots is \$2.00, and in cars on track, \$1.75.

### Livestock.

February figures on livestock show the following comparison with last year:

|                  | 1916.  | 1917.  |
|------------------|--------|--------|
| Cattle . . . . . | 7,599  | 3,230  |
| Hogs . . . . .   | 24,201 | 34,145 |
| Sheep . . . . .  | 414    | 21     |

Prices for hogs attained a new high level, sales being made at \$14.35 while the Grain Growers Company sold one whole car of stock at \$10.35, the high prices, so far, for a car lot.

sale of oleomargarine should be allowed in Canada." A civic deputation waited upon the Honorable Martin Barrill, at Ottawa to urge the removal of the embargo on oleomargarine. But the minister of agriculture gave them little encouragement. In replying Mr. Barrill said that the question was a big one. Three successive Governments and three successive Parliaments had gone on record as against oleomargarine.

There were two sides to the question, said Mr. Barrill. Butter was high in price, and the importation of oleomargarine might afford relief. But were they aware of the importance of the industry which they wanted to protect? "I do not think its importation would affect the price of butter now," said Hon. Mr. Barrill, "but in the long run it would hurt the dairy industry."

The Minister pointed out that three years ago the four western provinces were importing butter, but by 1915 the production in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba had trebled, showing how the industry had developed.

Butter had not gone up so much as other commodities, he said. He said that formerly Danish butter went to Britain in a steady supply. Since the war there had been a greater demand for Canadian butter, and the demand last year was something like 11,000,000 pounds, the largest since 1903. The importance of maintaining that steady supply was obvious, and was the biggest stimulant for promoting the manufacture of butter in this country.

Oleomargarine, said Mr. Barrill, was imported into all other countries, including New Zealand, but in every country there was also excessive legislation and fraud. The whole effect of the oleomargarine makers, he feared, would be to fraudulently sell their product as butter. The question would come up before Parliament, he said, but such a change as suggested

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would be fraught with endless difficulties and a lot of fraud.

### British Import of Oleomargarine.

The following figures appear in the Weekly Report of the Trade and Commerce Department, taken from the Record of Trade Journal on the imports of agricultural produce by the United Kingdom for the week ending January 13, 1917, as compared with the corresponding week of last year:

|                     | 1916.       | 1917.       |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Butter . . . . .    | 61,921 cwt. | 79,333 cwt. |
| Margarine . . . . . | 37,493 cwt. | 68,063 cwt. |

It would seem that the demand for cheaper food in the United Kingdom is increasing the import of margarine to such an extent that it is now almost equal to that of butter.

### SUGAR.

The refined sugar situation is in a very complicated condition, chiefly owing to the recent political disturbance in Cuba. Last year the Cuban crop was in the neighborhood of three million tons. Early estimates of this year's crop varied from 3,400,000 tons to 3,572,000 tons, but owing to the unsettled conditions which have developed on the Island of late, as well as the further fact that the content in the cane is not as great as it was last year, these estimates will have to be greatly reduced. Many well-informed people are of the opinion that the final output will not exceed that of last year. While the revolution in Cuba has not developed to any serious extent from a political point of view, nevertheless it has caused a great deal of unrest among the working classes and fear on their part of coming into the cane fields, with the result that at the present time some thirty or forty centrals are working at a greatly reduced rate. The season is now getting so well advanced that it is practically impossible to make up for the time lost to-day, so that with unfavorable weather developments, the actual output of sugar for the year 1917 might be considerably reduced from last year.

In addition to these conditions at the producing point, the United States market is on a more or less fictitious basis owing to the freight situation and prevailing labor troubles. The great bulk of distributing jobbers throughout the United States are inadequately supplied, and in many instances are entirely without supplies to meet the insistent demand of the retailers and consumer and the result has been that those few jobbers who had any available surplus supplies could, if they desired, sell same at practically their own figures and the final distributor, the retailer, has had in many instances so little available sugar that the ultimate consumer has paid a price commensurate with the moral character of the distributor.

To make the situation clear and in concise language, the present unusual situation prevails:

First, on account of labor troubles; second, on account of the political situation in Cuba; third, on account of the large export business taken prior to the labor troubles; fourth, the fact that when the above situation has culminated the trade throughout the United States were and had been operating on a strictly hand-to-mouth basis, with invisible supplies in distributors' hands almost entirely exhausted, and, fifth, due to the general railroad and harbor and tonnage congestion in the various ports.