

Conditions in the West

By E. CORA HIND.

Interest at the present time is largely centered on the decision of the railway board providing for an increase of freight and passenger rates.

The Executives of the Western Live Stock Shippers' Association and the Winnipeg Live Stock Exchange in joint session assembled, sent the following to Hon. A. Meighen: "We desire to register a united protest against the forecasted action of the Board of Railway Commissioners in granting a favorable decision to the railway companies in their application asking for a general increase in freight and passenger tolls in Canada. The proposed increase, especially in live stock rates, comes at a particularly inopportune time, in view of the present widespread and enthusiastic campaign for the increased production of live stock, especially hogs. We, being in the closest touch with the live stock producers, feel very certain that any increase in live stock rates, permitted by the Government at the present time would absolutely counteract any efforts being made now for increased production, which is so essential to the all important duty of every loyal citizen of Canada in supplying the necessities of life to our brave troops at the front.

We would humbly ask that in case any further consideration of rates might be granted, that we might be permitted to have our joint Associations represented."

The local railway officials are, of course, as much delighted with the advance as the Board of Trade is disgusted. They claim that the advance is absolutely justified by the increased cost of operation. The fight is likely to be a long and bitter one. It is figured here that if the decision of the railway commission goes into effect, the public will pay in additional transportation charges, between \$30,000,000 and \$40,000,000 per year, and of this, between 50 and 60 per cent will go to the C.P.R., as they have much the greatest mileage and handle by far the largest amount of freight.

The C.P.R. and the G.T.P., considering the shortage of labor, have kept their equipment in fair condition since the war started, but conditions on the C.N.R. are very bad indeed. Their passenger traffic was very heavy during the Christmas season, and even during the mild weather which prevailed in the earlier part of December, their trains were continually four, five, six, eight, twelve and sometimes twenty-four hours late, and with the increased cold weather, the service will be even worse. If the advance recommended by the Board of Railway Commissioners becomes law, the public will certainly be in open rebellion unless they get a vastly improved service for both freight and passenger line.

The fact that the announcement of the United States government taking over the railroads appeared in the same issue as the recommendation for higher rates in Canada, very naturally led to a great deal of comment as to the desirability of the Government taking over the railroads in Canada.

Of course, the conditions which led to the United States taking over the railways are very different to anything which exists in Canada.

Railway men here express the view that similar action in Canada is unlikely. One hope, which was expressed very freely here, was that the United States Government would see to it that Canadian cars, of which there are an enormous number in the United States, were returned to their respective railroads. This would very materially assist in the movement of grain and other commodities in Canada.

SUPPLIES OF GRAIN.

Figures which are being compiled indicate that the amount of the crop of 1917 already delivered to country elevators and over platforms, up to December 15, was roughly 138,000,000 bushels. Assuming that the Free Press estimate of 214,000,000 is correct and allowing 30,000,000 for seed and other local requirements in the West, this would leave 46,000,000 still to come forward from the farmers' hands. Personally I am of the opinion that we will get a little more than this, but the Northwest Grain Dealer's Association are putting the amount still to come forward at only 32,000,000 bushels. If they should be right, the situation with regard to our supplies for Great Britain is even more serious than was at first supposed, and that is serious enough. The need to save wheat and wheat flour is appalling and so far very little appears to have been done along that line. Everybody in the West is hoping for a definite order on the subject of a war bread or war flour. The

Canadian Visible at the present time is 29,000,000 bushels, as against 41,000,000 at the corresponding date of last year. The stocks in interior elevators are 21,000,000 as against 34,000,000 in 1916.

HOG CAMPAIGN.

During the week following the elections, the Manitoba Government put on an active campaign of meetings throughout the Province on increased hog production, and when the speakers arrived in the city on Saturday night, and checked up the results of the various gatherings, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture felt justified in stating that there would be an increase of 250,000 hogs in Manitoba in 1918. Alberta is doing well, and very considerable progress has been made in Saskatchewan. The time for breeding hogs will be over by the 15th of the present month, and by the end of the month there should be a fairly reasonable chance of checking the estimates of the three Provinces.

The question of feed and labor were the most difficult things to encounter in addressing the farmers on the subject. However, the progress made by the Food Controller's office in fixing the price for bran and shorts, help materially.

The turn of the year has come, but in almost every department statistics are behind, and it will be another week before it will be possible to announce the result of the year's operations on the farms. The returns, however, will be worth waiting for, as never in the history of the west have such prices prevailed for all kinds of farm produce.

The enormous spending power of the west was demonstrated by the buying of Victory bonds, the contributions to Halifax, and the fact that local expenditures were apparently not in the least curtailed. Here and in other cities the people on salaries are feeling the pinch of high prices, but the people in the country spend and spend. Never has there been such an exodus from the farms to California and the east for the holiday season. Jewellers and furriers report heavy trade.

The admonition of the Minister of Finance which appeared on New Year's morning, had better have been printed a month ahead to catch and possibly curtail the spending mania.

Of course, the spending power is not all due to the high prices. The absence of open liquor stores, hotels and saloons all over the west for a period of nearly two years, has been a tremendous factor in the accumulation of money for other things. Even with this allowance the west has yet to learn the lesson of saving and thrift that is so essential to provide against the stringency that must come, before and after the conclusion of the war.

Canada, east and west, is far from realizing the war even yet, and it will require very drastic measure on the part of the government and the Food Controller to bring home to the man on the street, and the woman in the home the need of the saving of the actual food.

MILK COMMITTEE.

There is to be an investigation into the whole question of milk supply in Manitoba and the Western Food Controller has been fortunate in securing the help of W. A. Wilson for many years commissioner of dairying in the Province of Saskatchewan, and who has just resigned that position to take charge of the co-operative creameries limited, a scheme which has for its object the development of the dairy and poultry industry of that province. Before starting in his new work, Professor Wilson will give Manitoba the benefit of his experience for some 10 days. The milk situation here is much more serious than the public realize. It has always been difficult to secure labor for dairy farms, owing to our long cold winters, now with the general shortage of labor the task is doubly difficult. Then Manitoba is short of fodder and coarse grains, which makes milk production very expensive. The present price of 13c a quart for milk makes an allowance to the handling companies of 5½c per quart, or 21c per gallon for pasteurizing, bottling and delivery. This leaves 31c per gallon for the producers, which is not sufficient to induce them to continue production, and thousands of dairy cows have been sold, some for slaughter and a large number to go to the United States. Any attempt to further raise the price to the consumer would be met with a storm of opposition, so that the inquiry will no doubt be along the lines of how

to reduce the cost of distribution so that the price to the producer may be improved without the cost to the consumer being increased.

LIVESTOCK TRADE.

While the value of the livestock sales for the year are not yet available the actual movement of livestock through Winnipeg yards is published, and the results are very striking. The movement of cattle was 236,651 as against 158,949 in 1916, and 110,452 in 1914. Of these cattle Saskatchewan contributed 137,357 head; Manitoba 112,554 and Alberta 33,622, while \$2,992 came in from Eastern Canada. The local consumption was 113,871 heads; while 33,253 went east, 37,877 went west, and 52,013 went south.

Among the most interesting figures are those showing the movement of unfinished cattle back to the land. A total of 73,914 stockers and feeders were received at the yards, and of these 14,372 went back to farms in Manitoba; 12,720 to Saskatchewan; 9,231 to Alberta; 17,086 to farms in Ontario, and 20,495 went south. This is a great improvement over 1916, when out of a total of 50,672 head of stockers and feeders over 21,124 went south.

The movement of hogs was 372,168 as against 317,821 in 1916, and 461,839 in 1914. Of the hogs, Manitoba furnished 102,619, Saskatchewan 158,690, Alberta 109,360; 172,933 were consumed locally; 187,504 went east; 5,467 head, mainly breeding sows and young stock pigs, went west, and 6,122 south. The number going south is not really large, but in view of the fact that it was largely made up of breeding sows that were taken over in November and December, it is regrettably large.

The movement of horses was 13,574, and of this number 11,243 came from eastern Canada, showing that the west is not meeting her own requirements in this respect.

The movement of sheep was 23,575, or 3,000 more than in 1916. Manitoba furnished 14,119. Of the sheep passing through the yards, 4,127 head were sent west as foundation stock for new flocks.

RAILWAY RATES.

The protests of the west with regard to the increase in railway rates have apparently had some effect, as Sir Henry Drayton, chairman of the railway commission, has notified both grain and livestock men that they may have a hearing in Ottawa on January 10.

WAR BREAD.

A conference here during the week between Professor Harcourt, the bakers, millers, and the local board of food control was not very satisfactory. The attitude of the bakers was one of hostility to everything that was proposed along the line of saving white flour. They saw lions in the path at every turn. Every proposed substitute would cost too much. Gathering from the discussion the attitude of mind of millers and bakers, it will take very drastic action on the part of the Food Controller to bring them to time in the matter of saving flour for the men overseas. The sooner that drastic action is taken the better.

WHOLE RAILWAY PROBLEM.

To consider the whole Canadian railway problem rendered imperative by the freight rate decision, a committee composed of Hon. Messrs. Reid, Meighen, Calder, Carvell, Robertson and Sir Thomas White, has been appointed.

The freight rates decision of the Railway Commission will not be given effect to until investigation by this committee. It is possible a further step toward nationalization of the transportation system may result.

TO NATIONALIZE WOOL INDUSTRY.

Southern Alberta wool growers, representing about a quarter-million head of sheep, are behind the scheme favored by the Dominion Government, to nationalize the sheep and wool industry by forming a huge co-operative company.

The sheep men, meeting here on January 4, expressed their approval of the scheme. They also passed some resolutions, among which was one to the Federal Government, asking relief from abuse of the free duty on breeding ewes, by which United States sheep men are driving their herds into Canada for grazing and thereby reducing the amount of land available for the herds established here.

"Doctor, my husband is troubled with a buzzing noise in his ears." "Better have him to go to the seashore for a month." "But he can't get away." "Then you go."—Boston Transcript.