

"A SCRAP OF PAPER."

The Board of Railway Commissioners of Canada, has always been considered by the Canadian Municipal Journal, as well as by the public generally, as one of the best institutions that was ever created in the Dominion, and it has been recognized as standing for the rights of the public, as against the claims of private corporations, and as having been guided in its decisions by equity, rather than mere legal technicalities. This was very markedly the case under the late Chairman.

But a recent decision of the Board causes some wonder as to the reasons which underlie it, and, some at least of the reasons which are given by the Chairman, do not quite coincide with those principles of business which are supposed to govern those who desire to act in a straightforward manner.

The case is that of the application of the Montreal and Southern Counties Railway Co., for permission to increase their passenger and freight tariffs.

The Company runs an electric service from Montreal, over the Victoria Bridge, through several municipalities, partly over its own lines and partly over those of the C. V. Ry., the mileage being a little over 52.

The Chairman, in his Judgment, states that the share capital is \$1,000,000; but does not say how much of this is paid-up, which is important in discussing the question of whether the business is a paying one. Nor does he say that the bulk of the shares are owned by the Grand Trunk Railway, which is important, in view of the fact that the Grand Trunk charges tolls for using the Bridge, which, the Chairman admits, it "might be necessary to scrutinize more clearly." Nor does he state that the tolls paid to the Central Vermont Railway also paid to the Grand Trunk, which controls that Company.

Referring to the tolls over the Bridge, the Chairman, says that it is "undoubtedly a very expensive structure, and the duty is imposed upon the G. T. Ry. of maintaining that part of the bridge used by the Electric Ry Co. "But he does not recall the fact that the Victoria Jubilee Bridge was paid for out of the public funds, as the late Chairman of the Railway Company stated at the meeting of his shareholders.

Thus the M. & S. C. Ry. Co., becomes a subsidiary Company to the Grand Trunk, paying to the Grand Trunk tolls for the use of the Bridge, and for the C. V. Ry. tracks.

It therefore appears that, so long as the Grand Trunk gets its income from tolls, it does not matter much about also getting dividends on the shares that it owns.

But the most serious part of the judgment is that setting aside the agreement made between the Company and the Corporation of the Town of St. Lambert. By this, a franchise was granted by the Town, one clause of which was the fixing of rates for passengers. But because other municipalities did not have the foresight to make such agreements, and are therefore subject to alterations at the decision of the Board, therefore the Chairman rules that the agreement between St. Lambert and the Company is to be set aside, in fact, it becomes merely a "Scrap of paper" which, like that which binds the Huns, is of value so long as it suits one of the parties to its term.

The Chairman rules that its "jurisdiction over rates is not shared by one conferred on municipalities." That is, that it does not matter what sort of a franchise is agreed upon between a municipality and transportation company, it can be set aside by the Railway Commissioners.

If this be correct, how can a municipality ever hope to make a contract, or give a franchise, which is worth the paper on which it is written?

There is one essential difference between the fares on a suburban railway, and those on a general railway. And that is, that the fares of the former are obligatory upon a large part of those using the service. They have gone to live along the line, and are compelled to use it every day, because they must get from their homes to their work. Therefore, any readjustment of fares compels them to pay extra daily. While, those travelling on an ordinary railroad, do so of their own free will.

The decision of the Board is a compulsory raising of the cost of living, and not merely an optional one. Those who have rented or purchased homes along the lines of the M. & S. C. Ry. are being fined by the Board for having trusted in the general understanding that a contract between two parties cannot legally be broken, except with the consent of both.

The Board of Railway Commissioners has, in this instance, been the means of breaking a contract, in spite of the consent of one of the parties. How often will they follow this very dangerous line of judgment? **H. B.**

BOLSHEVIKI DOCTRINES.

Bolsheviki doctrines have brought Russia down from one of the greatest food producing countries on the globe to a conditions of starvation. Drunk with liberty, which they did not understand, filled with idealistic notions about the equality of man, and lacking individual initiative, production in Russia has practically ceased, according to the evidences reaching the outside world. Transportation and distribution is so disorganized that even were the peasants of the land producing their usual amount of foodstuffs, the people in the manufacturing population would still be without the necessary food supplies to sustain them in safety and comfort. Unless the people of Russia, steady down and organize themselves or allow other authorities to organize them, there is the possibility of one of the most stupendous disasters to a nation and a great people that ever occurred in history. Without authority for whom they have fear and respect, the Russian peasant seems to be without motive or initiative. We read of peasants in their anger against the property holding class of the late aristocrat regime, destroying not only the personal effects of the nobility and the owning class, but the very crops which they had themselves under the former social organization produced for the nation at large. In their re-action against property owning, they have destroyed the goose that laid the golden eggs. We read of peasants in certain villages having gone to such extremes as to seize the cattle of the local land owner, now deposed, flay them alive and turn them loose. Without the old motive of compulsion to cultivate the land for the land-owner, now that the land has reverted to the peasants and they themselves are the owners, they have neglected to work and to produce the necessities of life. To such a pass is the nation drifting that recent dispatches have reported that the so-called Government of present-day Russia is sending plenipotentiaries to China, the formerly despised and so-called decadent neighbor to the east, to make arrangements for provisions to tide them over next winter. It is difficult to imagine China, one of the most densely populated areas in the world, living largely on rice and very meagre fare, having sufficient surplus to feed 150,000,000 people in starving Russia.

Bolshevism is sometimes quoted in this country as an ideal, worthy of imitation. The pass to which Russia has drifted is a warning that Bolshevism and insanity are not very far apart. The nation that will weather the storm of this war the best, is the nation that organizes most efficiently and disciplines itself most strictly. Production must be carried on to a limit of our power. Destructive criticism and petty fault-finding are weaknesses and dangers. Unity of purpose and constituted leadership is essential. It is a case of a strong pull, a long pull and a pull altogether. Men must be found for the army, for munition making and for food production. Non-essential industries must provide men for essential industries. Women in this country must take the places of men to the limit of their power when called upon. Farmers must recognize the necessities of war and the public in general must unite to save the harvest of 1918.—Exchange.

MUNICIPAL WOOD YARDS.

The Ottawa Board of Trade adopted a resolution which suggested to the Council of the city that in anticipation of a more serious coal situation in the winter of 1918-19 than in 1917-18, immediate steps be taken by the Council to secure this winter as large a supply of cordwood as possible for the use of its citizens during the winter 1918-19; this action to be taken even if it should ultimately result in some financial loss to the city in the venture.

The last clause of the Ottawa Board of Trade resolution is one of the best of reasons why the wood yard during this unsettled period should be a municipal affair. Private capital is ordinarily unwilling to assume the risk involved. The municipality can afford to take it and consider it virtually as an insurance against disaster. Is it not the duty of the municipality to itself to take this precaution? Should it not also do so to assist in the war?

Twenty sheep are required to provide sufficient wool to keep one soldier clothed. In Canada there are less than 5½ sheep per soldier. Wool is at a record price, as is also mutton. The Canada Food Board urges greater production of sheep and municipal co-operation in controlling the menace from dogs.