

*Railway Act—Mr. Reid*

Mr. MANION: He is not chairman of the board now.

Mr. REID: No, I was speaking of 1925, but I can get evidence from a little nearer home. When the amendment to the Railway Act was introduced in 1925 what did we find? We found hon. members now on the government side of the house but then in opposition saying one after another—I could quote Senator McRae, General Clark, and others—that it would be useless for the people of British Columbia to go again before the board of railway commissioners to plead their case. I have in particular the evidence of one who, it may be claimed, is an authority, and that is the Minister of Trade and Commerce. He stated when the bill of 1925 was passing through the house that the hands of British Columbia would be forever tied and that it would be useless for the people of that province to appeal to the board of railway commissioners in the hope of getting any reduction in freight rates. Speaking in this house on June 16, 1925, the present Minister of Trade and Commerce said at page 4320 of Hansard, when the amendment to the Railway Act regarding the Crow'snest pass agreement rates was then before parliament:

Now the minister says to us that he purposes by this legislation to give the Board of Railway Commissioners—I quote his own words—an absolutely free hand. He does nothing of the kind. Not only does he not give the Board of Railway Commissioners a free hand, but he deliberately ties their hands in so far as the fixation of rates is concerned on wheat and flour, which after all, is a tremendously important part of the freight carried in this country, particularly in western Canada.

A little further on in the same speech he said:

I do not ask special privileges, but I do ask for the province of British Columbia the opportunity to plead its cause on a firm and even basis. I ask for the opportunity for my province to come before the board and say: Here are the economic conditions; here are the reasons why we ask you for a freight rate structure of a given standard. But instead of that, the government is saying to the province of British Columbia: If you go before the Board of Railway Commissioners you go there with one hand tied behind your back. There is no escape from that.

I do not need to quote any other authorities to prove the contention which I have made ever since I first introduced the bill, that it is utterly impossible for us ever to get an equitable reduction of freight rates by appealing to the board of railway commissioners. They themselves have so stated, and I want to repeat that the members now on the government side of the house, when

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they were sitting in opposition in 1925, when the amendment to the Railway Act was going through, spoke to the same effect. It has also been my own belief that it is useless to go before the board of railway commissioners with any hope of getting redress.

Now what is our position in the province of British Columbia? A bill is introduced here asking for a reduction—or rather an equality—of rates, and we are told that the board of railway commissioners, and not parliament, is the properly constituted body to deal with that matter, yet we have it stated on the very best authority, as I have pointed out, that it is useless for us to go before that board. And so, Mr. Speaker, I am pleading at the foot of the throne on behalf of the people of my province that once and for all this differential be removed which has created a terrible handicap and has long been a great injustice to the people of British Columbia.

Probably the Minister of Railways will tell us that this is not the proper time to take such action, that the traffic of the railways has gone down, but I would point out that an argument of some sort can always be made. It was made in the prosperous days. We were told then that it was not the proper time to give us what we are now asking. I wish to point out, however, to the Minister of Railways, who perhaps knows it better than I do, that sixty-eight per cent of the traffic of the railroads in this country is wheat. At present we are looking for markets for our wheat, and where can our prairie farmers find a better market than in British Columbia? If we could get that grain at the same rate as those in other countries do, there is no doubt that a greater market would be found in British Columbia for immense quantities of the wheat and grain products of the prairie farmers.

I maintain, Mr. Speaker, that we were given just a sop last year when the railway companies for some reason or other reduced the rate on domestic grain by some eleven cents. When the railways did make that slight reduction and continued it for this year they omitted fifty per cent of the feed requirements of the poultry raisers which is mill feed. That omission takes a lot of answering. Our fight has been for grain and grain products, but the little sop that was handed to us by the railway companies last year, and which has been continued for another year, denied us a reduction in the rate on mill feed, which constitutes fifty per cent of the feed requirements of our poultry farmers. The result is that the people of Ontario and other eastern provinces—and I am not com-