

Council of Agriculture at Ottawa

Delegates Lay Views of Farmers Before Government

A delegation composed of representatives of the Canadian Council of Agriculture spent several days in Ottawa recently interviewing Sir Robert Borden and Hon. George E. Foster in reference to matters affecting the interests of agriculture in Canada. The delegation also attended two sessions of the railway committee of the House of Commons in order to make known the views of the farmers in reference to pending legislation concerning amendments to the Dominion Railway Act. The delegation consisted of Messrs. R. McKenna, H. W. Wood, J. B. Musselman, R. C. Henderson, and Col. J. E. Fraser, and H. B. Cowan, representing the United Farmers of Ontario.

The delegation laid before Sir Robert fully the Farmers' Platform. He had just returned from his trip to Great Britain and was crowded with work, but willingly took time to hear the delegation present its case. He said that he recognized the point that the recommendation of the farmers of Canada were radical in a number of respects and stated that while his colleagues and he would consider them seriously he could not hold out much hope that some of them would be granted as they affected many interests and would involve greater issues than might at first be supposed. He was not altogether in favor of the Dominion government adopting systems of taxation which might clash with the methods of raising revenue already being followed by several of the provinces such as inheritance taxes, income taxes, and the taxation of land values. These forms of taxation he thought might better be left to the provinces to apply. In reply to congratulations which had been extended to him by the delegation on the part he had taken in the councils of the Empire while in England, he expressed his thanks and mentioned that many important matters had been considered, some of which he purposed making public shortly and others of which would have to be treated confidentially. Sir Robert was very courteous in his reception of the delegation. He gave the impression that he was a man anxious to do what he believes to be in the best interests of the country, but the delegation came away feeling that before the farmers of Canada can obtain what they want from the government, it is going to be necessary to bring more pressure to bear on the individual members of parliament through the local farmers' organizations now becoming numerous in Ontario as well as in the West.

Railway Legislation

Several hours was spent by the delegates attending a sitting of the railway committee, at which legislation relating to proper cattle guards was under consideration. Both at this session of the committee and at one held the following day when matters relating to rural telephone lines and of special interest to the farmers of Ontario were under consideration, it was noticed that the railroad companies and the Bell Telephone Company had plenty of lawyers present to safeguard their interests. The farmers were without a lawyer to plead their case, but made such a strong case, more particularly in reference to the railway legislation, that Mr. McKenna, who was the chief speaker, was asked if he was a lawyer because of the knowledge of the situation that he showed. When he replied that he was a farmer, he was complimented by a member of the committee upon his handling of the case for the farmers.

For years the legislation relating to cattle killed by the railroads on the railroads' right of way has been most unsatisfactory in character. Time and again when cattle have been killed the railroads have escaped the payment of just claims to the farmers through the farmers being unable to prove that they had not left some gate open or some fence down. The proof of any neglect on the part of the farmer was sufficient to put his case out of court, although it might be perfectly apparent that the livestock would not have been killed but for the negligence on the part of the railroads. This was because the law was so worded that the onus of proving that there had been no neglect rested on the farmer.

At the meeting of the Canadian Council of Agriculture held in Winnipeg last December this legislation was discussed and it was decided to appeal to the government for a change in the law so as to

place the onus of proving that there had been neglect on the railway company. Recently the government has been consolidating the Railway Act and this suggested amendment has been under consideration. The proposed new Act complies with the farmers' request and makes it necessary for the railway company to establish that the damage was caused by reason of neglect by the farmer to take proper precautions to keep his livestock from getting on the railroad track before it can escape paying claims for stock that may be killed by its train.

One feature of the amended bill to which exception was taken by the farmers' delegation was a clause which were it enacted into law would mean that if a tramp or other irresponsible party were to leave a farmer's gate open and let his stock get on the railroad and be killed, the farmer would have no redress against the company. The farmers asked that this should be changed. They said that farmers were willing to be responsible for damage caused by their own negligence, but not by the negligence of others. They pointed out that the railroads have section men passing up and down all the time who should be able to see that gates left open leading onto the tracks were closed. On behalf of the railroads it was claimed that farmers might deliberately leave their gates open so that their cattle might stray onto the tracks and then claim that some tramp had been responsible for the mischief. In reply to this it was pointed out that as farmers never receive the full value of their animals when killed by trains there was no chance that farmers would so act. The members of the railroad committee seemed distinctly favorable to the suggestion of the farmers and the chairman asked that the farmers should re-word the clause of the act in a way that would be satisfactory to them. This the farmers agreed to do. The matter was left to be settled at a later sitting of the committee.

The clause in the act as amended by the farmers to be recommended to the railway committee for adoption reads as follows:

"When any horse, sheep, swine or other cattle, whether at large or not, get upon the lands of the company and by reason thereof damage is caused to or by such animal, the person suffering such damage shall be entitled to recover the amount of such damage against the company in any action in any court of competent jurisdiction unless the company establishes that such action was caused by reason of negligence on the part of the farmer."

"Any person for whose use any farm crossing is furnished, or his servant or agent, or the person claiming such damage, or his servant or agent, wilfully or negligently failing to keep the gates at each side of the railway closed, when not in use or by any such person wilfully opening and leaving open any gate, on either side of the railway provided for the use of any farm crossing, without some one being at or near such gate to prevent animals from passing through the gate unto the railway; or by any such person taking down any part of a railway fence, etc."

It will be noticed from the foregoing that the company must establish neglect and that they must show that the person causing the neglect did so wilfully or negligently.

The Telephone Situation

At the last convention of the United Farmers of Ontario a resolution was passed protesting against the action of the Bell Telephone Company in making an extra charge against members of independent farmers' telephone lines above its regular rates who use its long distance connections. The farmers' representatives did not find it necessary to take part in the discussion when this matter was before the railway committee, owing to the fact that officers of the Independent Telephone Association were present in force and made a very strong case for the independent lines. In some cases the Bell Company has refused to give the Independents any connections, and in other cases it has imposed terms that are considered onerous. The matter was discussed for several hours and ended by the chairman of the railway committee asking the representatives of the Bell Telephone Company and of the Independents to appoint three members each and see if they could not come to some agreement. This was done.

Interview on Grain Situation

Members of the delegation from the western provinces had an interview with Sir George E. Foster in reference to provisions of the Grain Act and the change in conditions in the west that has been brought about through the removal of the duty on grain passing between Canada and the United States.

The several days spent by the committee in Ottawa showed how important it is that the farmers of Canada shall be better represented at the capital when parliament is in session. All manner of legislation affecting the interests of farmers is often dealt with there without any one representing the farmers' organizations being present to watch the farmers' interests. The business interests seem to be represented invariably by experienced lawyers. The time possibly is not far distant when the farmers will be equally well represented at the capital.

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Neely, of Humbolt, supported the amendment. The debate will be resumed next week.

As a preliminary to the amendments to the budget resolutions moved by Mr. Oliver, a speech was made by Hon. Geo. P. Graham, which was apparently designed to outline in a general way the attitude of the opposition in regard to the tariff. Incidentally he asserted that there must be a change in the policy of the country in regard to the taxation of lands. It must be realized, he said, that citizens of all classes will be called upon to pay special taxes, and that this being so, the owners of land should be made to bear their share of the burden, more particularly when that land is being held for speculative purposes.

Curse of Speculation

Mr. Graham said in part: "I was struck very forcibly by the remarks of the member for Dauphin (Robert Cruise). I agree that in order to produce a revenue in the years to come, a good many of our former theories will have to go by the board. Methods recognized as proper for the raising of revenue in the years gone by will still be used, but they will have to be supplemented by others. I think it is the consensus of opinion throughout Canada that these taxes should not be imposed on the producers of agricultural products. In fact, I am strongly of the opinion that we shall have to deal with the tariff from a different angle. The farmer must be enabled to produce as cheaply and in as large quantities as possible. If his output is restricted, none of the rest of us need look for any great prosperity, because, while industrial development is desirable, it will for a great many years be true of Canada that the basis of our prosperity must be found in the farms. We shall have to go a long way towards reducing the cost of production and giving the farmer the freest opportunity to sell where he can get the best possible market and to buy as cheaply as possible all the implements that he uses in production. In a recent trip I had west this view was impressed upon me more strongly than ever. Striking instances came to my attention of real hardship to the men who were trying to produce. In the future we shall have to do two things: first, assist the man on the farm so that he can compete with all others the world over who are engaged in the same business; and, second, re-adjust our tariff with a view to raising as large an amount of money as possible. That, rather than protection, should be the chief object in view. We shall have to go a long way in the scientific arrangement of our tariff in order to raise the greatest amount of money without restricting the ability of the man on the farm to produce. The time has arrived when the good of the greatest number should be the object of the framing of the tariffs, and the greatest good will come to the greatest number only when we enable those engaged in our basic industry, so far as it is possible to do so, unrestrictedly to produce and sell."

Tax All Vacant Lands

Coming to his land taxation proposals Mr. Graham quoted Mr. Cruise as stating that there are held in the west many million acres of land from which no revenue is derived, but the value of which is increasing rapidly on account of the improvement of other lands and

proceeded: "Then under the new conditions we shall have to devise some scheme of dealing with these lands from a revenue point of view and from the point of view of general development. A large quantity of these lands is exempt from provincial taxation; and if normal conditions existed I would feel it would perhaps be a dangerous thing to suggest that such lands ought to be taxed, when by agreement they are exempt from taxation; but we are at the present moment in a situation in which every man, woman and child in Canada has to submit to taxation to which neither he nor she ever expected before to have to submit, and we shall all gladly offer to pay our share in order that there may be no difficulty from a financial point of view as to Canada being able to do her part in bringing the war to a final and conclusive victory. Those who hold these lands ought to bear their share of the burden, and I believe, whichever party may be in power, it is their duty to ascertain without delay some means whereby this land, which is now very valuable, may contribute its share of the taxation for the carrying on of this great struggle in which we are engaged. No hardship will be suffered by anyone if we take part of the profits, or what we call the unearned increment."

Clarence Jamieson asked Mr. Graham if he proposed to tax railway lands as well as lands held by private individuals.

Mr. Graham replied that he certainly did. Most of them he said had been increased in value by improvements made on adjoining lands. He would call in every man interested in these lands and say to them: "We propose to devise some means whereby these lands will contribute their share towards the carrying on of the war." Taxation of these lands, Mr. Graham went on to argue, would result in increased cultivation and this would help solve many of the present problems which confront Canada, including the railway problem.

GRAIN MEN IN OTTAWA

A strong delegation of Winnipeg grain exchange men are in Ottawa this week at the invitation of Sir George Foster to take up the discussion of food control and prices, and no doubt, the forthcoming appointment of a food administrator will be considered and the views of the delegation sought.

Sir George Foster wired to Winnipeg last Saturday inviting James Stewart, Canadian buyer for the British wheat commission, and T. A. Cregar, president of The Grain Growers Grain Co., to join the conference and they left immediately. It is understood that the Winnipeg men have a definite and well considered plan for the handling of the new crop which they have submitted for the consideration of the minister.

WAR AND WHEAT PRICES

The high price for wheat, due to war conditions creates an interest in the price levels attained by wheat in other wars. The previous record of \$2.16 was reached shortly after the Civil War, that price being reached in October of 1867. During the Civil War the high record price was \$1.93½ reached in July of 1864. During the Crimean war, in 1855, when Russia was fighting England and France and sending them none of its grain, wheat sold at \$2.50 per bushel in New York. During the second year of the Crimean War, the Liverpool price for wheat averaged \$2.34 per bushel. It became very dear in 1807 and 1808, when Napoleon's "Berlin decree" forbade all exports from France, Holland or Germany to England. The United States went to war with England in 1812 and Napoleon invaded Russia. On top of that, both the English and Continental harvests ran very short. In that year, the average Liverpool price of wheat was \$3.95 per bushel, and once in the year it reached \$4.25.

The waste of only one ounce of edible meat or fat every day by each of the 20,000,000 families in the United States means a daily waste of 1,250,000 pounds, and an annual waste of 456,000,000 pounds of valuable animal food, according to the Department of Agriculture. This, it is stated, would be equal to slaughtering 875,000 steers, or over 3,000,000 hogs, and allowing the meat to spoil.