

Moose Jaw Times-Herald June 17/25

IS THE WEST UNITED OR DIVIDED?

Under the heading, "The West Divided," the Toronto Globe, of the 12th inst., devotes its leading editorial to an attempt to show that the West is a house divided against itself on the matter of the Federal Government's railway rates policy. It quotes the Manitoba Free Press and the Winnipeg Tribune as being incensed because "everything except the protection of the east-bound grain and flour rates is swept away," and "the West is deprived of its magna-charta—the statutory limiting of freight rates." To prove its allegations that the West is divided, the Globe quotes the Regina Leader as being wild in its criticism, and as saying that the rates on grain and flour are of the greatest importance, and that their retention will go a long way toward removing disappointment caused by giving the Railway Commission power over rates of minor importance. "The Prairie Provinces," adds the Leader, "will do well to consider the effect of the Government's action before condemning it."

Going West to Alberta the Globe finds the reception given the Order-in-Council is unqualifiedly cordial, and quotes the Edmonton Journal (Conservative), as saying the Government's declaration is very satisfactory, and clearly in the interests of the country. The Edmonton Bulletin rejoices because the northerly half of the Prairie zone will be freed of the discriminating Crow's Nest rates, and it thinks the rates on Alberta grain to Pacific ports should be substantially reduced. The Calgary Albertan describes the Government's decision as "one of the best pieces of news the West has had for some time," the Prairie Provinces having won their chief point. On the Pacific Coast there is apparently the same unanimity. British Columbia particularly welcomes the prospect of getting freight rates which will facilitate the movement of traffic through the Rockies east and west, in view of the situation created by the Panama Canal and the rapid development of trade with the Orient. The Vancouver Province says: "We appear to have struck a trail that leads us back to the sunlight," and ventures the assertion that "if the greater part of Canada's grain is to be shipped through Canadian ports it must be made possible for Vancouver to draw a larger share of the output of the Saskatchewan farms than she is able to do under present conditions." The Vancouver Sun sees a victory for Vancouver, and predicts that 2,600,000 people from Winnipeg west will become "economically tributary to Vancouver."

On the surface of things, it would look as though there is a cleavage of opinion, which, as the Globe says, seemed to be governed by longitude. But down at bed-rock the West is not divided. The whole West is one when it comes to fighting high freight rates for the West as against low freight rates for the East. On the question of how best to fight this great crime of the railways against the West, there is a difference of opinion, and this cleavage is not governed by longitude so much as it is by self-interest. Vancouver rejoices because it hopes to divert traffic from the eastward to the westward; and Winnipeg is alarmed because the Crow's Nest Pass rates are a prime factor in maintaining its position as a great distributing centre. Winnipeg is interested in maintaining car-lot freight rates into Winnipeg, and the lowest possible local freight rates in the West. The numerous distributing points throughout the West are more interested in favorable rates for car-lots on the long-haul and maintain that goods can be distributed and transported more cheaply with the long carload-haul and the short local haul with quick deliveries. So there is naturally a conflict of interest and a difference of opinion, and there always has been. The action of the railways in deliberately setting out to make a "scrap of paper" of the Crow's Nest agreement, by refusing to apply its rates generally, as was done for years before the war, but instead limiting its application to points on the map in 1897, has brought these differences into conflict, which was exactly what the railways planned to do.

It will in the end be a mighty dear victory for the railways. At the time the railways did it we pointed out that they had started something that they would have reason to regret.

There is cleavage in the West over how best, and by what means, to fight for our rights, but there is no division over our right to the same rates as enjoyed by the East. This is made clear by the Western bill of rights in freight rates, as drawn up at Regina at a conference at which the Governments of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, together with all business interests affected, were represented. This document covers the ground adequately. These are its chief provisions, constituting demands to be made upon the Dominion Government:

"1. That maximum statutory freight rates should be fixed on grain and flour not exceeding the rates on these commodities set under the Crow's Nest Pass agreement, and that such rates should be applicable from the whole of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta."

"2. That proper equalization of freight rates throughout Canada is impossible without statutory provisions for maximum rates in those parts of Canada in which freight rates are not controlled by competitive water transportation rates—the principle which is recognized and admitted in connection with grain and flour in the proposed legislation."

"3. That the Board of Railway Commissioner for Canada should be instructed to equalize rates on grain and flour outward-bound from points in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, in any direction, with those obtaining under the provision of the Crow's Nest Pass agreement."

"4. That the Board of Railway Commissioners for Canada should be constituted as a truly national body with more equal representation from all

parts of Canada in order that there may be proper understanding by the Commission of the rate problems of the whole country."

The second provision covers the point carefully ignored by the Government in its proposed legislation. It calls for statutory maximum rates on west-bound traffic. This question is the heart of the controversy. The railways asked a year ago that the principle of statutory control of west-bound rates be removed from the statute-book. The West has thus far been successful in retaining this right, by an appeal to the courts; but the legislation submitted to Parliament by the Government is a complete surrender of the Western position.

The schedule of west-bound rates, fixed by the Crow's Nest Pass agreement, is admittedly out of date, as the Free Press says. But it can be modernized; or, what would be still better, statutory provision can be made for a fixed ratio between east-bound and west-bound rates. "Such a provision," the Free Press says, "would put it beyond the power of the railways to recoup themselves for low Eastern rates, induced by water competition, by high rates in the West, which is a non-competitive area. Without some such protection the West will be systematically exploited; it will be relied upon, in rain and shine, good times and bad times, to produce dividends for railway shareholders. The Railway Commission, even though it be improved as to personnel—for which there is great need—will afford the West no real protection against such exploitation."

"We trust the Western representatives in Parliament are fully seized of the seriousness of this issue. It means the difference between a West, bled white by railway exactions, and therefore checked in its development, and a West of growing population and heightening prosperity. We trust also that the Government has some slight understanding of the political consequences that will follow the carrying out by it of the program of spoliation of the West embodied in its draft legislation."

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