

SCOPE OF LABOURS IS BEING BROADENED

Inter-State Commerce Commission Funds Steady Tendency of Litigation to Expand

INCREASING ITS STAFF

Scope of Last Year's Work Compared With Year Preceding—Reasons for Enlargement of Number of Cases Heard—Several Classes of Contests—Analysis of Situation.

Washington, D.C., February 17.—Instead of gradually curtailing the scope of its labors as railroad questions of the broader sort are disposed of, the Interstate Commerce Commission is enlarging its activities in many directions. This fact has been made clearly apparent by testimony offered by officers and members of the Commission in a statement before the House Committee on Appropriations, recently made public. In response to a question, the Secretary of the Commission said that there had been during the past year 35 special investigations, 8 of these as a result of resolutions of the Senate, 3 by request of the House Committee on Interstate Commerce, one continuing investigation, while the rest were undertaken of the Commission's own motion. There was an increase of 139 formal complaints as compared with last year. During the year ending December 31, 1914, there were 1,169 complaints, as against 1,030 in 1913. During the last four months of the year there were 815 hearings, as compared with 545 during the same months a year ago, or an increase of 270 hearings. An addition of 18 attorneys to the staff at a total salary of \$71,200 per annum was another element in the situation.

Growth of Litigation.

Of course the striking showing thus made has aroused no little interest. When Commissioner Harlan was before the Committee on Appropriations, the case was clearly put to him, questions being raised whether the legislative conditions were such as in any way to invite contention. He was asked whether under existing circumstances there was danger of more and more litigation between shipper and railroad, and whether there was a chance of getting to the point where warfare of that sort would slacken by reason of the establishment of more equitable conditions. Commissioner Harlan sought to explain the situation on the ground that pending cases involve broader and broader issues; that shippers are looking into rates more carefully than they used to; that traffic managers are employed by many concerns; and that there is a better understanding of the work of the Commission and of the scope of its power to secure an adjudication of disputed issues. Other circumstances of like nature are mentioned by others, but the fact remains that instead of establishing a state of things in which railroad questions are comparatively quiescent and settled the drift seems to be toward a larger volume of controversy and difference of opinion, even though this, as suggested by Mr. Harlan, may be due to a better understanding by shippers of the possibilities of defending their positions under the law.

Unnecessary Controversy.

That there is a good deal of unnecessary or artificial controversy is also believed by many persons. During the committee consideration already referred to, Representative Sherley asked Mr. Harlan: "Are you not really having a situation where the commercial clubs and boards of trade of various cities of the country are hiring men whose chief occupation is to find some way in which they can either do away with what they think is an inequality or get an advantage over some competitive city, and that practically the shipping fraternity has gone into various local combinations for the purpose of litigating rate-making, so that they may get different rates and differentials?" That the case is as thus suggested by Mr. Sherley was fully admitted by Commissioner Harlan for he said in reply: "Undoubtedly that is so"; then went on to say that many cases that are now coming before the Commission are brought by shippers' associations or leagues, which have hired rate experts, often from the railroads and sometimes from the Government service, to look into the rates of particular communities, and to find out what rate inequalities and discriminations exist and to bring them to the attention of the Commission. It appears also that there are many independent claim bureaus or "audit companies" that go to shippers and ask for their expense bills, often discovered overcharges and ultimately filing petitions for reparation. Such bureaus are compensated on a percentage of all money recovered. This tends to enlarge the number of cases before the Commission, so much so that some such suits are practically always pending.

Character of Contests.

The cases before the Commission are dealing to a less and less degree with rebates, and to a greater and greater degree with the larger problems of differentials between places, general issues like the five per cent. rate case, and others of a similar nature. This means that the Commission has to have a larger staff than formerly, and to keep it constantly at work. During the past year, for example, the only special or outside counsel employed was Louis D. Brandeis, of Boston (engaged on the five per cent. case), who received \$11,500 for salary and expenses. While, however, rebate work has fallen off and differentials have largely taken first place, there are still many claims for damage in transit that represent (probably) concealed rebates. Other damage claims are excessive or fraudulent. Complaints regarding coal car distribution have been numerous but are now slackening off. The accounting practices of the roads receive a good deal of attention from the Commission, although the lines are co-operating more and more with the Government officers. Depreciation problems are also numerous, and the establishment of reciprocal relations between roads calls for a good deal of study and adjustment. Safety device work also requires the service of a considerable staff, and the same is true of boiler inspection. The activities of the Commission are undoubtedly expanding largely, there having been during 1914 an increase of about 18 per cent. in the number of persons employed on the staff and of about 25 per cent. in salaries.

Albany, February 18.—The Mills Corporation, of Oneida County, has been chartered with a capital of \$1,000,000 to manufacture cloth, yarns, etc.

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MOVEMENT TO MAKE OTTAWA AND SUBURBS A FEDERAL DISTRICT

Expectation is That Something of a Definite Nature in This Connection Will Take Place During the Present Year.

Messrs. Wood, Gundy and Company, of Toronto, are offering \$1,275,000 City of Ottawa 1½ per cent. debentures on a basis to yield 4.90 per cent. and 4% per cent, according to maturity.

The City of Ottawa has the distinct advantage of being the capital of the Dominion of Canada, and this feature is a permanent asset that is in no wise jeopardized by whatever unfortunate conditions may arise and prevail in other cities. The Federal Government employs over 3,000 people, and the buildings, numbering nineteen, cost \$22,675,000. The annual payroll amounts to \$5,125,000.

There is a movement on foot at the present time to make Ottawa and the immediately adjacent suburbs a Federal district, similar to that of Washington, D.C., in which case the affairs of the district would be administered by a commission appointed by the Federal Government. In the municipal election of 1914 the question was voted on and passed by a large majority. Since then a commission has been appointed by the Government to report on the matter, and it is expected that something of a definite nature in this connection will take place this year.

According to the records of the Ottawa city authorities, this is the most attractive price at which City of Ottawa securities have ever sold to the investor. Reference to the fact that the city is the seat of Government for Canada, and that its finances are exceptionally well managed, Ottawa bonds have always had a very ready market. As a matter of fact, until this year their issues have gone abroad to be listed on the London Stock Exchange, and it is a very great while since Ottawa bonds in any amount have been offered on this side. The last sale made by the city was in September 1913, when the bonds were offered to the investors in London at about a 4.65 p.c. and 4.70 p.c. rate.

MILITARISM OF LEMON GROWERS

Business partakes to a large extent of the character of war, and even the agriculturists have at times to wage battle. Instead of sitting down and depending upon Providence, the farmer now fights the grasshopper and the boll-weevil and the worm. The fruit growers' enemy is Jack Frost and the Seattle Daily Bulletin tells interestingly how the campaign is carried on. Its Los Angeles correspondent says:

"Intrenched under cover of a battery of 1,000 firepots, with videttes hourly scanning the thermometers for signs of a sally of Jack Frost from his mountain lair, the fruit growers of the State stand ready to battle to the death for the safety of their \$35,000,000 citrus crop."

"According to the white paper of the United States weather bureau, and the rule of averages, there is real danger from the great white frost after Christmas.

"Through counselling growers to be continually on their guard, United States Weather Forecaster Carpenter says the records show that killing frost in Southern California is usually more a case of nerves than real danger."

"The freeze of 1912-13 is the only one of its kind on record," he said. "Yet our records, by inference run back 145 years to the time when the padres planted a cactus hedge at San Diego Mission. This hedge went unscathed through frost after frost until the winter of 1912-13, when it was severely damaged."

In the Weather Bureau's own records from 1849 to date, the 1912-13 frost period stands out as the only one in which severe damage occurred."

London, February 17.—The Bank of England has issued a circular to its branches in America and elsewhere, calling attention to the fact that the Bank of England has been compelled to close its New York office.

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