

SHALL WE OWN THE LINE ELEVATORS?

RESULT OF FIRST SKIRMISH WITH THE PREMIERS

The so-called reply of the Premiers to the demands made by the farmers for the inauguration of a system of storage elevators owned by the Provincial Government and operated on their behalf preferably by a commission, is not in fact a reply at all but simply a not too clever evasion of the question.

As a diplomatic move it is rather crude, as a belief in its effectiveness to divert the farmers from their aim must be based on a not very flattering estimate of the intelligence possessed by our agricultural population.

No doubt the Interprovincial Council will deal with the so-called reply in such a manner as to uphold the dignity of the class they represent and administer a merited rebuke to the premiers for their disingenuous treatment of demands so closely connected with the prosperity of nearly the whole of the population of Western Canada.

Below is given the text of the demands addressed to the premiers some time last May. At the conference held in November following it was patent to every grain grower present that not one of the premiers had even made himself conversant with the details of the farmers demands. They were even then harping on the necessity of a monopoly. One premier tried to convince the farmer delegates that the British North America Act made it impossible for a provincial government to engage in trade to the extent of selling storage, issuing a negotiable document or weighing a commodity, because power to deal with trade and commerce and weights and measures resided in the Dominion Government. He evidently forgot that at the Manitoba College the provincial government buys milk, makes butter, weighs and sells it, and that the Ontario government runs a railway and as a feature of that business, issues negotiable warehouse receipts and bills of lading.

As to the fear of loss without monopoly, if a little bunch of farmers here and there can build elevators and risk the competition of the large corporation line elevators, surely a government has nothing to apprehend.

Our farmers ask for provincial operation of elevators whether Dominion legislation can be obtained or not for the reasons set forth below.

They show however that a very slight amendment to the grain act would immensely increase the effectiveness of provincial operation and have strong hope that such legislation can easily be obtained. Reported by Mr. Castle as to the increase in car lot shipments, this is partly due to an increasing determination on the part of the farmers not to patronize privately owned elevators which have treated them badly in the past. Many who now load direct would welcome the opportunity to use a government elevator.

Also the rapid increase of railway construction has largely increased the number of shipping points unsupplied with elevators so that many must perforce load on track no matter how inconvenient it may be.

TEXT OF THE ACTUAL DEMANDS

Resolved, that we, the members of the Inter-provincial Council, having the verbal suggestions of the Premiers placed before us, and having carefully considered same, regard them as being totally inadequate to safeguard the interests of the farmers in marketing their grain and we beg to reiterate our former request that the Government acquire and operate the interior storage facilities along the lines previously stated, more specific details in certain particulars of which are given below.

1. That the Government provide by purchase or construction or both at each railway point where any considerable quantity of grain is marketed, elevator facilities with up-to-date equipment for cleaning, weighing and loading grain, that these facilities for the most part be sub-divided into bins of 1,000 bushels capacity, and that the system be operated by the Government direct, or through a commission appointed for that purpose.

(2.) That the minimum capacity required at each shipping point will be approximately one-third of the quantity annually marketed there. This whole amount need not, however, be provided at the outset, but the storage structure should be so arranged as to admit easily of addition and extension as necessity demands.

(3.) That the charges for handling and storing grain be such as to provide interest on amount invested, cost of maintenance and provision for gradual payment of initial cost.

(4.) That a certain per cent. of the storage (not to exceed 25 per cent.) should be at the disposal of buyers of street grain.

(5.) That two or more farmers be granted the privileges of jointly occupying a bin.

(1.) Advantages without the co-operation of the Dominion Government:—

(a.) The abuses incident to the storage facilities being in the hands of those interested in the purchase and sale of grain would be abolished, such as, improper grading, the giving of light weight, the taking of excessive dockage, the substituting of grain of inferior quality for that specially binned by the farmer, denying the privilege of special binning to the farmers on the false plea of lack of space and interference with the freedom of shipment of stored grain by the owner.

(b.) Adequate facilities for the cleaning of the grain are not provided by the elevator companies. The Government system would enable the cleaning of grain to grade requirements before shipment, retaining to the farmers a large amount of screenings valuable for feeding purposes, increasing their chances of obtaining higher grades when grain was inspected from point of shipment to the terminals.

(c.) Dockage would be no longer a matter of guess work. The farmer would be credited with his exact amount of cleaned grain and permitted to retain his screenings, which oftentimes include valuable food products, such as broken grains and domestic grains of various kinds, as well as weed seeds having a high feeding value.

"The following facts illustrate the saving possible in this connection. It is estimated that the 70 millions of wheat of the crop of 1906 contained 2 per cent. or 1,400,000 bushels of screenings, averaging in worth $\frac{1}{2}$ cent. per lb. and which cost the farmer on an average 10 cents per bushel in freight charges, owing to his inability to have his grain cleaned before shipment. These two items represent a loss of \$560,000 to the farmers of the West, which will occur every year with additions until abolished by the establishment of a Government storage system equipped with proper cleaning apparatus. The above amount would pay the interest on a sum sufficient to create the storage system asked for and provide a sinking fund which would liquidate the cost within a reasonable term of years."

(d.) The grain being weighed into cars by a Government official having no interest therein, will facilitate the collection of claims for shortage from the railway companies.

(e.) The preservation of the identity of grain in special bins under the custody of Government officials will make possible the establishment of a sample market which will largely