

Conditions in the West

Freight Situation Critical -- Sample Grain Markets to be Inaugurated at Winnipeg

Special Correspondence by E. CORA HIND, Commercial and Agricultural Editor, Free Press, Winnipeg.

The week has had some exciting moments so far as the markets are concerned, and on December 20th there was a fluctuation of practically 12 cents on the Winnipeg market. The market opened that day at 5 cents below the previous close and it was claimed that the rapid advance was due to heavy covering by shorts and also by buying for government accounts. This latter was difficult to trace and it was generally supposed that all of it was not for the allied governments. The slumps from time to time were directly traceable to peace rumors, and so far as Winnipeg markets were concerned, it was a case of following Chicago.

It seems impossible for the American mind to divest itself of the idea that the United States is going to be an important factor in bringing about peace. It will take more emphatic and more pointed snubs than they have yet received from Britain and her Allies to convince them that their intervention is not regarded favorably in peace proposals; the extreme statement of Secretary Lansing had little, if any, effect on our market. The last two days there was a steadying of prices, and evening up of trades, and when the market closed today for the Christmas Holidays, it was freely stated that only the very largest houses had any quantity of trades on either side of the market.

Receipts at country points have been very small, due to the extremely cold weather, and movement forward has been materially retarded by the territorial embargoes on the Canadian Pacific Railway which have existed for several days, and today a complete embargo on Eastern movement was inaugurated by the Canadian Northern. The freight situation in the West at the present time is extremely critical, the two weeks of exceptionally cold weather that have preceded Christmas add-

very serious conditions, and western movement of perishable goods out of Winnipeg has been retarded by the taking off of heated cars on a number of the lines.

Sample Markets.

On top of the existing difficulties, the announcement of the Hon. Robert Rogers that the sample markets at Winnipeg and Fort William were to be inaugurated immediately, came like a clap of thunder in the clear air. The changes in the Grain Act suggested by the deputations which waited on Sir George Foster some little time ago with regard to the question of licensing of "hospital" or private elevators at the head of the lakes were to have been discussed by the various grain exchanges, cooperative elevator organizations and the like, and a report sent to Sir George Foster. Evidently in the absence of his colleagues, the Hon. Robert Rogers has been 'putting one over' on them. He has always been, or professed to be, in favor of sample markets, but if the truth were known his present action is probably due to the impertunity of his friends who are interested in some of the larger of the so-called "hospital" elevators, and who see in the amendments to the grain act, which would permit of mixing in all of the houses at the head of the lakes, a menace to their extremely profitable business, and who have apparently suggested that by utilizing the power already conferred upon the grain commission and instituting a sample market, they will be spared the discussion of this matter in Parliament, where more things might come out than are altogether desirable.

It is understood that Sir George Foster told the delegation that waited on him, that if they could assure him of the unanimity of desire for these amendments, that he would submit them, but that he would not submit anything that would raise controversial questions in regard to the grain act at the coming session, which was really a war session of the house.

The farmers' organizations are just as firmly opposed to the idea of the sample market as they have ever been, and are sending in urgent petitions that matters be stayed.

So far as the railway companies are concerned,

they also are protesting, and with reason; the congested condition of traffic at the present time is bad enough, and if it is to be accentuated by the holding of cars in order to take samples and the like, it will add to the confusion.

The full texts of the defence for amendments to the grain act, oddly enough, are not available, the statement was that they were put in hurriedly, and only one copy was made, and this was filed with Sir George Foster. In view of the importance of the whole matter and its vital effect on the country's basic industry, it seems a little remarkable that those who defended these amendments should be so unwilling for the public to have the full text of that defense.

It is to be hoped that when parliament sits, some western member will have the 'savvy' and the courage to ask for the reports which the Grain Commission have made to the Department of Trade and Commerce on the work of these "hospital" elevators. There is somewhere in the pigeon-holes of the department of the Minister of Trade and Commerce, these detailed reports, and they would make mighty interesting reading.

It is rather remarkable that in view of the fact that all terminal elevators are obliged to publish every detail of their business, that these "hospital" elevators, who claim to have handled over one quarter of all grain reaching the head of the lakes last year, should give no account whatever of what business they have done, or how they have done it.

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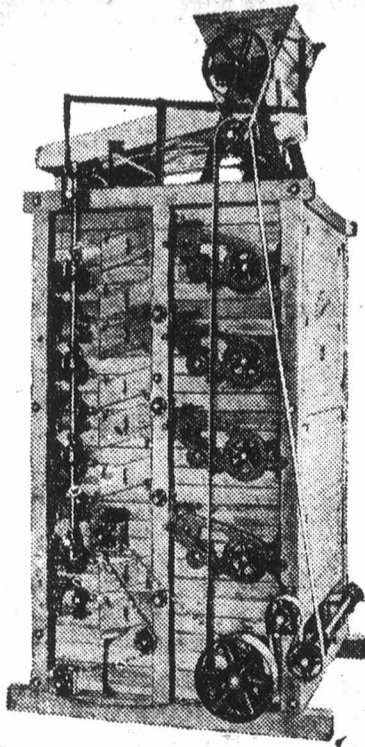
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