

HOW TO SOLVE THE GRAIN PROBLEM

(By F. W. Green, Moose Jaw.)

At the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' convention held last February in Regina, the following resolution was passed:—

"Resolved that in the opinion of this convention, the problem of marketing the wheat crop of western Canada can best be solved by government control of all terminal elevators, and the establishment of a system of government controlled internal elevators, the whole to be operated by a commission appointed by the government, the railway commission and the three provincial grain growers' associations, the whole cost to be borne by the grain trade."

In speaking to the motion at that convention, I advocated that the Dominion government undertake this course, and after securing the terminal elevators, and establishing an interior system, appoint a commission or a board of control, consisting of six members, two to be appointed by the Dominion government, one each by the grain growers' associations of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and the sixth to be an expert railway manager to be named by the railway commission.

I would have this board of control place an inspector and weighmaster at each of the interior terminal elevators to be established at strategic points, such as Winnipeg, Portage la Prairie, Brandon, Moose Jaw and would cause the railways to have specially constructed grain cars that could be easily emptied, and during the grain season a local grain train or trains would have to be placed on each railway division to keep the initial receiving points supplied with empties, and take the loaded cars either to the interior terminal, or if possible through to the terminal at Fort William. By delivering into the terminals the short haul would enable the railways to provide a steady supply of cars at the initial points of shipment and clean up the division of all receipts every twenty-four hours.

It would also be the duty of this board of control to charge a reciprocal demurrage for delays in supplying cars and in loading cars; to buy all grain offered and advance from a trust fund 75 per cent of the price, the balance to be forwarded when sale is completed; to receive offers for grain for delivery at Atlantic ports and to sell to highest bidders. Under the system it would be necessary for farmers selling their wheat to the board of control to pool it, settlement to be made daily or weekly as may be thought most practicable, or the board of control could buy it outright as the grainmen do now, and profit by all dockage, etc. A charge of one cent a bushel would be made on all grain inspected, this sum, together with all receipts realised from the sale of screenings, and dockages to go to the credit side of the "grain fund," on the debit side of which would be the cost of the elevator system, and the expenses of operating the same.

This plan would simply establish one huge grain growers mutual association for the handling and shipping of grain under quasi-government control and ownership, all the costs to come out of the grain fund and all the profits to go to the credit of the grain fund. It would be an extension of the farmers' elevator idea to the wholesale basis, or the application of government assistance to the government assistance to the creamery business, to the wheat industry.

The above is a fair idea of the idea as advanced at that time. This resolution was hurriedly put together so as to place our ideas before the convention in as short a manner as possible, with the idea that if it met with approval, the next thing to do would be to get Manitoba and Alberta to endorse it. Then get the Royal Grain Commission to make such representations to the Dominion government as would be likely to give it effect. If these different bodies will not endorse it, it is not likely that the Dominion government will. But if the people of the west say it will do the work, will fill the bill, we have sufficient encouragement from the different ministers of the government to believe that the money and law changes necessary will be forthcoming. Of course, we must agree on something if we are to have a change. I think we may consider that the plan put forward by the Manitoba Grain Growers will not likely be adopted, and if it is it will not help either Saskatchewan or Alberta. Neither do I think that the plan put forward by them, if adopted by the three different governments would work out satisfactorily. It seems like the postal service, large enough for Dominion control. With all our talk and resolutions we are still in the same position. What is there in the thoughts or objections of R. C. Sanderson? He admits that there is a car shortage problem to solve. I say yes, and in addition an elevator monopoly to bust. This plan is designed to kill both at one shot. He says nothing but reciprocal demurrage will do it. Well, that is part of this plan—only we provide the storage; we make it possible for the railways to provide the cars, and then fine them heavily if they don't. Sanderson says internal elevators

will not solve it. How does he know? His statement is neither argument nor proof. He says there will be no change in mode of handling grain.

The grain growers of the three western provinces and boards of trade all over the west, together with delegations to the government from many of the largest cities and towns state there has got to be a radical change, and I say when we farmers get down to business and think our way out and act in unity, there will be a change, and that a rapid one.

R. C. Sanderson further says that if this plan is adopted railways will charge 1 cent to stop car, 1 cent to unload, 12 hours' time to unload, and 12 hours to load. Does it not take 12 hours now to load a car, and sometimes three weeks to unload? He says that under such a system there would have to be a law to compel a man to put his grain in the internal elevators, thereby causing him to lose 3 cents a bushel. He says that four men shipping same day, one would get his wheat through to Fort William, the other three would get theirs sent to the interior elevators; the one going through would likely be 8 cents ahead of the other three men. Yes, that is just exactly what does happen under the present system—four men want to ship and only one can. The three that get left are just that much behind the one who gets his wheat through. Now that is one of the things the interior terminal scheme will obviate. That is just one of the places where the present system is so manifestly unfair, and just where the proposed system would equalise them.

At present all cannot get their grain shipped when they want to, and according to the best informed on this feature of the trade, if they did there would be a blockade at all the lake ports, and the rottenest kind of a market, in consequence of putting as much of our wheat on the market in six months as should go on in ten. Seeing then, that all cannot go on, and ought not to go on, should it not be arranged so as to have it arrive at the lake ports at about the speed it is best to send it forward, that is in proper proportion to each of the navigable months; and also arrange so that each shipper bore a just portion of the cost of handling and storing. The proposed plan would do that. In short it is on the same plan as the government managed the creamery butter sales.

Just a little more about that loss of 8 cents. Are we not losing that now? Do we not have to pay storage, interest and insurance now? Do not most men have to pay for the extra handling? Can any man lay wheat down anywhere and pick it up again for less than 1 cent per bushel? Can farmers ordinarily afford to lay wheat down in the field in either temporary or permanent bins and keep the major part of it till the following spring and take the chances of waste, or haul in spring or summer time, pay for the bins and interest, pick up the grain, perhaps once or twice, then put it in the present elevator system, as Mr. Sanderson proposes?

I say we cannot afford to do it, and yet are not most men compelled to do so under the present system? Under the proposed plan we would have all the cars we required when wanted. We would not have to lay our grain down unless we wished to. We would get our grain handled at cost, no trust or combine could get their clutches on it. We would get our share of the surplus if there was one, and of course there would be one, because all grain handlers all say it is required as a necessary precaution. We would get a share of the mutton made out of the screenings, which would be fed at the first inspection point instead of paying freight on them to Fort William and then presenting them to the owners of the terminals as we do at present. Our commission would have no need for the grain exchange, because they would be the grain exchange, and they would get reports from all over the world. The Manitoba Grain Growers at the recent convention asked the Dominion government to get this information for the public. This commission could get it and give the public full benefit of it by selling to the highest bidder and let that one cent commission also go to the credit fund. I would only be a cool million dollars.

Then all this grain that we could not get forward, and which ought not to go forward, would be in store in our own elevators, and if as Mr. Sanderson says, 50 per cent of it was in there, say fifty million bushels, and it costs, as he says 8 cents for storage and interest, this would be the enormous sum of over four million dollars. Surely there would be a profit on that of at least 50 per cent, two million dollars, and that also would be ours, which under the present system goes to the elevator men.

Under the present system there is an average dockage of about 2 per cent at the hands of Mr. Horn. This on a hundred million bushels is two million bushels, which at one cent per pound would be one million two hundred thousand dollars, which would be all ours under the proposed system, and which at present the elevator men get at the terminals.

Why not build at initial points, says Mr. Sanderson, and the present system, no matter by whom managed could handle all the grain. Sure they could, they do now.

But that is just where the proposed plan would make a change. They would handle just those lots where people did not have a carload, and they would make those little lots up into carloads, and that is all they are, or ever were, fit for. They were intended to buy retail lots and make them into wholesale lots; but what they do now is to compel men to retail what they grow wholesale. The proposed plan would enable you to ship a ten thousand bushel lot without mixing, instead of as at present by the wagon load.

No elevator system can compel railways to distribute cars in proportion to wheat shipped, says Mr. Sanderson. Why of course they do that now, only they take their own time at it. But in the next breath he infers you can by reciprocal demurrage compel them to give cars within a given time of being ordered. That is just where the proposed plan shines. The commission, which is the government says to the railways: "We will provide the storage close to the grain fields, viz., at strategic points; you must provide a special service to take grain from initial points to the internal or divisional points. These cars must not leave the grain fields or prairies; we will make a reciprocal demurrage law and a stringent one; you must furnish cars to these men within twelve hours of the time ordered or pay to the shipper five dollars for each 12 hours delay. The shipper to pay an equal sum if he fails to load or cancel. We say to the railways, 'It is not reasonable to ask you to haul this grain 800 miles just now as fast as we can deliver it, but you can haul it one or two hundred just now and take the whole year to get to the lake front. At present they take the year, force you to keep it on the farm until they are ready to force you to put it into the terminal elevator, that docking, screening, mixing the grain, and so on, and so on."

But, says our critic: If you can make them furnish cars for a short haul, why can you not do it for the long one, if it only needs equipment. Just for the same reason that a farmer 40 or 50 miles from a railway cannot get enough teams to haul dirt from the threshing to the cars and keep the threshing going properly. It is simply in my opinion, as before intimated, not possible, nor would it be wise if it was. There is a limit and reason should be exercised in everything. "Well," says the critic, "suppose I do not want this commission to sell this grain?"

If this plan were adopted you could not sell your grain to better advantage. It would be done at cost; every market would be open to the commission and they would have every facility for knowing every part of the business. They would simply act as your agents. Yet it could be worked so that you could get your certificate as you do now, subject to the government charges as it is now. "But how would I know when it would reach Fort William?" our critic asks. How do you know now? You cannot tell anything about it under the present system. "Allowed, yet how would I know under the proposed plan?"

Well, all grain being in the commission's hands, the railways must put so much each month to the lake front if they are going to get it out at all. It will be known when your grain was received at the divisional point, and the certificates could take precedence in the order issued. You will see that it is only in regard to grain shipped in September, October and November that you need fret about, for after that the wheat might as well be stored in the west as at Fort William, so long as it gets there soon enough and fast enough to load the lake carriers in May and the following months. This would give the railways time to haul coal and other supplies in the winter time, and it would not be nearly so expensive to haul the balance of the crop. They know this and they have that in view now. That and the fact that it pays elevator men to have their elevators full of wheat all winter—only sixteen million bushels of last years crop went out before the close of navigation and who do you suppose paid the storage on the remainder of the crop, and to whom was it paid? If, as Mr. Sanderson says, the expenses of storage through the winter is 8 cents, if that was equalised on the whole crop it would not be more than five cents. If half of that was profit, the real cost would not be more than 2 1/2 cents on the whole crop. Now take those four men shipping wheat the same day that Mr. Sanderson spoke of, which has the right to send his forward under the present system, and which has the right to get 8 cents more for his wheat than the other. If they all did get it forward all would lose 8 cents or more. Who is to make the 8 cents? At present often the most unscrupulous makes it, the law-abiding gets left. Under the proposed plan all four would get rid of their wheat the same day, all would get the same price for wheat of the same quality.

How could we get the cars? The cars would be on the division and never leave it, except those possibly which came in loaded, that is, ordinary passenger train, and that is possible because the cars

would always be there and a place to empty them. The traffic manager would not have to depend for empties on the spasmodic supply of the ordinary merchandise car. Well, how would you load them? We would likely have at a place like Indian Head where Mr. Sanderson lives, platform long enough for, say, ten cars, wide enough for teams to pass, nicely roofed and perhaps a dump for each car, with a short leg to put grain into car, a short running, or rope drive from engine at one end, the whole in charge of one man. If that was not enough we might have two such with engine in centre, and perhaps a platform scale, where every man would know just what he put into the car. Cost a lot! Yes some. But not so much as one elevator does at present, and which you would pay for. And you could put more grain in the cars in ten hours than you could in three elevators. No waiting with teams, no mixing your wheat. All your wheat would go to the divisional point that night, you would get your official weight, and grade and money next morning by the regular train. All of the ten, yes, all of them.

Well, our critic says: "This whole plan of yours would cost a lot of money." Yes, but we have paid a lot of money into a plan already and we don't own it or control it. We buy the present system every year and then don't get it.

But the proposal would not cost nearly so much as the Hudson's Bay railway, which will not solve this matter, because it will leave us just in the same position as we are now after we have paid our millions for it. What shall we do? Get together stay together, think together, and keep possession of our wheat till we get it on the world's market.

You might say, "Would not the Grain Growers' Grain Co. solve the question?" Yes, if every wheat grower was a member and would ship his wheat through the company, and would wait for his cash until the grain was finally put on the market, or otherwise would put up enough working capital to properly conduct the business. That would solve the elevator monopoly. But we would still have to get the grain forward. This plan aims to settle the whole thing. Transportation, elevators, grain exchange, etc. Get the government to loan us the cash at 4 per cent, place it at the disposal of their commission to handle the wheat of this country for the men that produce it.

FROM HERSHELL ISLAND

Edmonton, Sept. 7.—Comptroller Fred White, of Ottawa, who has charge of the R.N.W.M.P. in Canada, arrived in the city yesterday on business connected with the force. He went out to Fort Saskatchewan barracks, accompanied by Attorney general Cross.

Inspector Howard and his four men who have been stationed at Hershell Island, in the Arctic ocean, for the past three years, have returned and are also staying at the Fort.

THE SUPPLEMENTARY REVENUE ACT

Editor, The West.

Dear Sir,—The villages and towns are exempted from taxation, under the above act, because, according to the government, they are burdened enough with taxation already, but provision was made by the government at the last session of the assembly to lighten this burden, therefore, with the exemption provision their burden by this must be fairly light. It is claimed by the government, that nearly eighty per cent of the revenue from this tax will revert to the rural schools. This indicates, and judging from the proposition that is given them, that the rural schools should be the first to be exempted and given that nice provision the government made for the towns and villages. On the other hand if the towns and villages are in the most need, this nearly eighty per cent should go to them. And Mr. Scott, says in his letter, it would be greatly to their advantage if they stood in the same relation to the act as the rural schools do, notwithstanding that the reason given by the government exempting them was that it would be a disadvantage for them to be in the same relation. That is, they were exempted to their advantage, but now according to Mr. Scott it would be to their advantage to be included. What a sublimity, coming from the premier of Saskatchewan? Is this because he is incapable of anything better? or because he is an elusive politician attempting to deceive the farmers? To the intelligence of the rural districts his letter is an insult added to injury. If the government wanted to tax the speculators, ranchers, bachelors and poor new settlers who are yet unable to provide school facilities for their own children, for the benefit of existing schools, why not exempt the rural districts as well as the towns? The expense of collecting and distributing this tax, which, by the way, will be about 5 per cent, could easily be avoided by letting the local authorities collect it. But the government has gone on the principle of robbing the farmers of their property in order to manipulate it to the advantage of their own friends, as the Dominion did in with holding

our public lands from us, which if Mr. Scott and his friends had helped us to obtain would save us from this direct taxation. After joining the Dominion government to deprive the province of its rightful property and when the result of their treason in the form of a depleted treasury haunted them they jumped on the rural districts and trampled local authority under their feet. As the Dominion government is the sovereign power in provincial matters, so the municipality is and should be recognized in municipal matters. This is the principle of the Provincial Rights from Oliver Mowatt up to the present have been contending for, a principle to all appearances, altogether unknown to Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Mr. Scott and his friends; or, if they have "any comprehension of it, surely they do not love it. Not only the Supplementary Revenue Act contravenes the Local Improvement Act, see Sec. 56 and compare with Sec. 7 Supplementary Revenue Act, but it shows a great lack of good breeding and etiquette treating the rural districts as if the inhabitants were slaves. It is a most clumsy piece of legislation; a monument to tyranny and incapacity.

Yours truly,
LOUIS GABRIEL.
Duluth, Sept. 6th, 1907.

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