

*Ocean Shipping Rates*

others with regard to excessive ocean freight rates that it seemed to me the proper thing for the government to do under the circumstances was to endeavour to settle this question in the way they propose to settle it, that is, by appointing a committee to bring out all the evidence bearing on the question and giving the steamship companies, the manufacturers, and all other parties concerned the fullest scope to lay their arguments and evidence before the committee, which could then decide whether there is justification of the allegation that to-day excessive ocean freight rates are being charged by the north Atlantic shipping conference lines.

Mr. BRISTOL: Where you have tramp steamers on the one hand and liners on the other competing for grain, how do you hope to lower the price by any other method?

Mr. DUFF: Here is a letter from the Dominion Millers' Association written on January 15, 1921, addressed to the present right hon. leader of the opposition.

Mr. BRISTOL: That is with respect to flour. I am dealing simply with grain, which is the biggest thing grown in the west to-day, and in the rates on grain you have the greatest competition in the world.

Mr. DUFF: It is quite true there may be open prices on grain, but my hon. friend must realize that there is a conference—I will not call it a combine; but there are meetings of the different steamship interests, not every day perhaps, but every week or whenever any important matter comes up—and while cattle and grain rates may not come under this conference, you cannot tell me that these people, meeting and discussing the rates they shall charge on other commodities, do not agree among themselves what they shall charge on grain and cattle.

Mr. BRISTOL: They have to meet the tramp situation from day to day. Sometimes in Montreal there are a large number of tramps, and the price goes down. Sometimes the liner wants to fill up space, and she will take grain for that purpose; but that is a distress cargo; it is totally different. Wheat is the great basic commodity, and there you have the greatest competition in the world, and you cannot get away from it.

Mr. DUFF: But if it were not for the tramps, the rates would probably be very much higher than they are.

Mr. BRISTOL: They might be, but you must remember the tramp is the greatest thing in the world to bring rates down.

[Mr. Duff.]

Mr. MORRISON: Does my hon. friend know that the tramps charged more for carrying wheat from this side to Liverpool during the last year than the liners?

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. The hon. member for Lunenburg (Mr. Duff) has the floor.

Mr. DUFF: I do not object, Mr. Speaker, to questions.

Mr. IRVINE: I understood the hon. member was giving information for my special benefit just now, and I would like to say that is not what I need. I am quite willing to admit that freight rates are high, although I do not know that they are. The information that I want is this: Does this proposal which the government has advanced guarantee to us any hope that the rates will be reduced? That is the kind of evidence I want, and my hon. friend has not given me any reason why I should vote for the government's proposal in the hope that it will reduce rates.

Mr. DUFF: Then I presume my hon. friend wishes to leave the rates as they are, and not try to do anything.

Mr. IRVINE: Do not presume that. I will tell you what I wish later. What I am asking for is some evidence that this proposal will bring down the rates.

Mr. DUFF: In my opinion the government deserves credit—

Mr. IRVINE: I am not worrying about credit, but about the reduction of freight rates.

Mr. DUFF: You are not worrying about them as much as the manufacturers and others whom I have quoted are worrying. You evidently do not want to do anything. You say you do not know whether this proposal is going to do anything or not. Now in everything in the world, whatever the enterprise may be, people go into it without knowing definitely what the result is going to be, but they go into it with the hope and expectation that better conditions will result, and I feel as other people feel, and as the government must have felt, that even an attempt in this small way is going to bring good results. I believe that it will bring good results, and the steamship companies to-day are worrying more about this thing than my hon. friend from East Calgary (Mr. Irvine).

Mr. IRVINE: Does the hon. member not admit that a little common sense would perhaps be of as much value in a proposal of this kind as mere hope?