

## Our Ottawa Letter

Railway Commission Given Power to Locate Railways—Six Cent Rate on N.T.R. of Little Use.

(By The Guide Special Correspondent)

Ottawa, April 14.—Parliament took a step forward in railway legislation this week which, had it been taken 10 or 15 years ago, would probably have saved the country millions of dollars and left the railway situation generally in a much healthier condition than is the case today. Credit for the forward move belongs indirectly to Sir Adam Beck, the promoter and champion of the hydro electric and radial development scheme which is doing so much, and promises to do more, for the people of Western Ontario. The railway bills dealt with by the railway committee of the Commons included two renewals of charter for the C.N.R. in the Toronto-Niagara-Hamilton district. These charters had been in existence for some time and a small portion of the lines covered have been built. The hydro electric interests, however, strenuously opposed the extension of the charter on the ground that the hydro radials propose to serve the same territory, both with transportation and power. For four days the fight was kept up in the railway committee, but finally the bills passed, as the majority of the members of the committee took the view that the C.N.R., having commenced construction and secured its right of way, possessed vested rights.

In the House of Commons the fight was renewed by Western Ontario members more particularly, and on a couple of occasions the bills were "talked out." The problem became so acute from a parliamentary sense that it was realized that a compromise would have to be reached. The first proposal was to insert a provision in the bills that the Railway Board should have the final say as to whether the C.N.R. or the hydro radials would have the right to serve the territory. Apparently it was finally decided that it would be better to give the Railway Board such increased powers in regard to all railways in future. A joint committee of the two houses, which a couple of years ago considered a revision of the railway act, agreed upon a clause giving the Railway Commission the right to decide whether it was advisable to build a railway even after a charter had been granted by parliament. It was decided as a solution of the difficulty, the railway act revision having been deferred on account of the war, to amend the act by the adoption of a bill giving such powers to the board. This bill came up for consideration on Monday, and was disposed of in a couple of hours. There was practically no opposition to the general principles of the measure, with regret was expressed that it should be necessary for parliament to surrender functions which it has exercised since Confederation.

J. G. Tyriff, while declaring that he was glad to support the bill, said that in order to carry its purpose to a logical conclusion, railway companies ought to be allowed to go to the secretary of state instead of to parliament for charters. As the matter now stands, he said, parliament would really have nothing to do with the granting of charters anyway.

In explanation of the measure Hon. J. D. Reid, acting minister of railways, said: "The powers heretofore held by the Board of Railways Commissioners are not in any way changed. The bill simply adds to their powers and leaves entirely within their jurisdiction the decision as to location of the railway."

### The Lobbying Evil

W. F. McLean thought it was high time that the control and regulation of railways should be in the hands of some responsible body, thoroughly cognizant of the situation; who would hereafter prevent the unnecessary duplication of lines, by reason of which there has been not only a great waste of capital but an unnecessary duplication of service. He said that there are railroad trains being run alongside one another that will, if maintained, entail a great waste of public money and prevent any improvement in the railroads of this country. He added that the only way to give the country a better service is to consolidate the railway system and get rid of the unnecessary duplication of service.

George McCraney, of Saskatoon, frankly told the house that the members of parliament were delegating their authority to the Railway Commission because they had lost confidence in themselves. The reason for this, he said, was two-fold, adding: "It is because we have sought advice from the lobbyists of the railway companies rather than from the minister of railways. I think that the solution of the whole question is to keep the lobbyists out of this house. When we get the lobbyists out of this house, and the minister takes hold of this matter, there will be no need for legislation of this kind at all, and parliament will continue to exercise its functions with the advice of the minister of railways representing the government policy. Every man who has been a member of this house for years must have been disgusted at times by the manner in which members of parliament are lobbied and entertained to Lucullus feasts and button-holed. It is not in accordance with the dignity of parliament. I do not think that anybody has been corrupted by this sort of thing; I do not think it could corrupt anybody; but it makes a man uncomfortable. It is because we have been trying to please those fellows who met us in the lobby that we do some things that we would rather not do, and that we would hand over these matters to the members of the Railway Commission because we think the lobbyists could not get at them."

### Six Cent Wheat Rate

Announcement was made by Hon. J. D. Reid, acting minister of railways, that the six cents a bushel rate on wheat that was put in force by the government on January 6 last will be continued this summer from Armstrong to Quebec over the N.T.R., when the wheat is for export. He could not promise that this rate would be continued on wheat carried for export over the Temiskaming and G.T.P. lines, because the agreement entered into last January with those lines expires on May 1.

The matter was brought up by J. A. Robb, of Huntington, who is in the grain business. He said that judging by an answer to a question, the rate was not made much use of. Up to March 1 only 100,000 bushels out of the 300,000, 000 bushel crop had been handled at the six cent rate. The intention of the department in putting the rate into force, he said, was probably good, but in practice it has been a gold brick to the farmers. His explanation of the small use made of the rate was that an exporter buying May wheat at four cents above the market price would be just about one cent a bushel better off by using the six cent rate in winter. The rate, he said, was practically of no value to the exporter or to the western farmer during the winter months, but it might be of value in the summer, and it was therefore desirable that it should be continued.

Hon. J. D. Reid said it was a mistake to suppose that only 100,000 bushels of wheat had been carried over the N.T.R. line since the close of navigation. He said that according to a memorandum which was prepared by one of his officials the Transcontinental up to May 8 moved 4,000,000 bushels of grain from Fort William in the West. The minister was not prepared to state, however, that this was moved at the six cent rate.

Hon. G. P. Graham said he was glad to hear that the Transcontinental had moved 4,000,000 bushels of grain. He added: "I see that the manager of the government railways says that it would take the three transcontinental railways 200 days of active operation to move the grain crop alone. With that estimate, and with the boasting of the hon. gentleman as to what the road is doing, we shall probably hear no more of the uselessness of the Transcontinental Railway."

### Steamship Subsidies

When the subsidies for steamship lines were being voted on Thursday, Sir George Foster stated that the vote of

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