

Acton Burrows on Compensation for Carrying Postmen on Electric Railways.

Acton Burrows appeared before the Senate Committee on Banking and Commerce, in Ottawa, May 29, and made the following remarks:

Honorable Gentlemen:—The day before yesterday and today are the first occasions on which I have had the honor of appearing before a parliamentary committee, and I respectfully crave your indulgence, as, although not young in years, I am young in experience of this nature. Allow me to explain that I am the publisher of a technical paper, the Canadian Railway and Marine World, and am also Honorary Secretary-Treasurer of the Canadian Electric Railway Association, composed of 90 per cent. of the principal electric railway companies from Cape Breton to Vancouver.

The object of this association is, as set out in its constitution, the acquisition of experimental, statistical and scientific knowledge relating to the construction, equipment and operation of electric railways, and the diffusion of this knowledge among the members of the Association, with the view of increasing the accommodation of passengers, improving the service, and reducing its cost, and the encouragement of cordial and friendly relations between the roads and the public.

The sections of this bill to which we take exception are numbers 8 and 9, which read as follows:—

"8. Letter carriers in the service of the Post Office Department shall be conveyed on every electric railway in Canada, except municipally owned electric railways, on such terms and conditions, and under such regulations, as are made by the Postmaster General.

"9. If any company operating such electric railway refuses to carry any such letter carrier at the amount so fixed by the Postmaster General, the company shall refund an amount equal to the difference between the amount so fixed and the amount actually expended for such carriage."

The companies affected by these sections had no notice of the introduction of the bill in the Commons, and no chance to be heard before any committee of that House. The first we heard of it was a report in the daily press that it had passed its third reading, so that this is the first opportunity we have had of expressing our views. The bill was not distributed to the public until after it had been read a third time, and the first copy of it which reached me came in the same package as the Commons Debates of May 4, which contained the discussion on the third reading.

Against the provision that electric railways, other than those municipally owned, shall carry postmen at whatever rate the Postmaster General of the day may decide, we respectfully enter a most emphatic protest. As a matter of right, the Dominion Government has no claim on electric railway companies for the performance of any service on exceptional terms.

Parliament has empowered the Governor in Council, not the Postmaster General, (See R. S. 1906, chap. 66, sec. 115) to fix the rates to be paid the railways for the transportation of mails. These mails are carried almost entirely by steam railways, which have received Dominion subsidies in aid of construction. Personally I do not think this power should be vested even in the Governor in Council, but that the matter should be dealt with by a body such as the Board of Railway Commissioners. On the other hand, it can be argued that the steam railways have been subsidized and that, therefore, they should perform certain duties for the Government on exceptional terms. But with electric railways the position is entirely different. Not one of them, urban

or interurban, has received any subsidy from the Dominion, with the single exception of the Oshawa Railway, in Ontario, which was originally promoted as a steam railway and was voted a subsidy in aid of construction, but was subsequently built as an electric line.

We submit that there is no reason why postmen should be carried at any less rate than any other passengers. As a matter of fact, with their bags of mail matter, they take up more room and weigh more than ordinary passengers. There is no reason why they should not be supplied by the Post Office Department with tickets bought at the ordinary rate.

But the electric railway companies were willing to be reasonable with the Department, and to save it trouble, and with this end in view, some years ago, a number of the companies entered into contracts to transport postmen at a lump sum per man per year. The electric railway industry was then almost in its infancy. The lines had not been in operation a sufficient time to enable accurate cost data to be worked out, but when this was done it was found that some of the contracts had been taken at ridiculously low rates, and that the companies were actually losing money on them. In 1909 the Canadian Electric Railway Association conducted an investigation, and as a result, came to the conclusion that it did not pay to carry postmen at less than \$50 each per year, which, of course, works out at less than \$1 per week, and that in the larger cities, with wide areas and long distances of travel, the rates should be higher.

The rates asked of recent years by the electric railways are not necessarily excessive because they are higher than those originally accepted. The companies would be perfectly justified in asking that the lump sum per postman per year should be as much as would be paid if they were supplied with tickets at ordinary rates. Since the first contracts were made with the Department, the expenses of conducting street railway transportation have vastly increased, particularly wages, and all construction work, rolling stock, and other supplies have largely advanced in price. As a result, the cost of transportation per passenger is considerably higher than it was a few years ago.

In the United States a straight 5 cent cash fare is almost universal, and the necessity for higher fares in Canada is illustrated by the cases of several of the municipally owned lines in the northwest, for example Edmonton, which has recently advanced its rate to 5 cents, except for limited tickets during certain hours. Saskatoon is following suit, and in Lethbridge and Brandon it has been necessary to adopt one-man cars, that is, to have one man act as both motorman and conductor in order to make ends meet.

Last year the Postmaster General introduced a bill of three sections, practically the same as sections 8, 9 and 10 of the present bill, but without the words "except municipally owned electric railways," which made it apply to all electric railways. We had an interview with the Postmaster General, and other members of the Government were subsequently called upon, and the bill was withdrawn.

We asked the Postmaster General for a conference between himself and his officers and representatives of our Association, but we have not been accorded this, and the withdrawn bill of last year has been again brought in as part of a general bill, but

with the municipally owned electric railways excepted. I have no hesitation in saying that the true reason why municipally owned railways have been excepted is because the Union of Canadian Municipalities took strong exception to last session's bill, and had they been included this year, similar opposition would have again been offered by the municipalities interested. The managements of many of the municipally owned lines are far from satisfied with the rates they have been getting, and I know that in several cases they want more.

It has been charged by the Postmaster General that some electric railways have been extortionate and have attempted to hold up the Department. We take emphatic exception to that statement.

The companies have also been charged with having no consideration for the postman. This is equally foundationless. It is the duty of the Department, not of the electric railways, to provide for carrying postmen and to give them every facility for making speedy delivery of letters. This is recognized by the provision in the Post Office Act (R.S., 1906, sec. 73, ss. 2), which reads as follows:—"In places enjoying the free letter carrier delivery system, the Postmaster General, in lieu of paying street railway companies for the transportation of letter carriers, may pay to any carrier, to defray his cost of transportation, a bulk sum not exceeding \$50 a year, but this provision shall not apply to places where carriers are entitled to free street railway transportation."

The Postmaster General is thus given the power to allow postmen up to \$50 a year to pay their transportation on electric railways, yet when electric railways ask that figure, he accuses them of being extortionate, etc. We challenge the fullest investigation of the whole question, which would undoubtedly show that the electric railway companies have been most reasonable in their demands.

Last year, in an interview with the Postmaster General, we said "We are so sure of the reasonableness of our case that we are willing to leave the matter in the hands of the Board of Railway Commissioners, a body appointed by the Government." The Postmaster General replied, "No, I will not agree to that, as the Board would probably decide according to the value of the service." In other words, that he is not prepared to pay what the service is fairly worth. It is therefore evident that the Postmaster General has not an open mind on the question, and we object to the rate of compensation being left to him, or to any other one person.

If the Postmaster General is to be given the power to say what shall be paid for carrying postmen, why should he not be given similar arbitrary power to compel manufacturers to make letter boxes for the streets, the mail bags the locks for the boxes, the postmen's uniforms, and everything else the Department requires, at any rates he may determine?

The Postmaster General is not willing to accord to electric railways even the same rights as ferrymen have, namely arbitration. The Post Office Act (R.S., 1906, chap. 66, sec. 88) provides as follows: "Every ferryman shall, upon request, and without delay, convey over his ferry any courier or other person travelling with the mail, and the carriage and horse or horses employed in carrying the same; and the sum to be paid for such service may be fixed by contract; or if any ferryman demands more than the post office authorities or the contractor for carrying the mail are willing to pay, the amount to be paid shall be fixed by arbitrators, each party naming an arbitrator, and the two arbitrators naming a third; and the decision of any two of such arbitrators shall be