

Mr. VENIOT: A fair average price under present conditions would be twelve or thirteen cents per tie.

Mr. MANION: That is, clear.

Mr. VENIOT: Yes.

Mr. MANION: I should like to justify further the attitude we have taken in this matter. After I had made the statement refusing to give the information, on the advice of the railways that it was not fair to them nor in the public interest to give that information, I had this question looked into and I found that the Hon. Mr. Robb had done exactly the same when in my position, as had also the Hon. Mr. Dunning.

Mr. MACKENZIE (Vancouver): But not under the unemployment relief act.

Mr. MANION: The conditions are exactly the same; the purchases were made by the railways, contracted for by them. So far as the railways are concerned, the conditions are exactly the same. We were giving the Canadian National Railways up to \$1,300,000, and I am informed that the amount will probably be under \$1,000,000. But so far as the refusal to give information is concerned, that refusal is based upon exactly the same grounds as in the past. I have here a memorandum with respect to the matter, which I shall put on the record:

On March 15, 1926, the late Hon. Mr. Robb, on behalf of the Minister of Railways, replied to a question by Mr. Donnelly, as to whether certain contracts for ties had been entered into with certain parties in New Brunswick, the number of ties, and also the price. Mr. Robb gave the information as to the contracts, and the number of ties contracted for, but as to price stated: "Not in the public interest to give information of this character."

That was the attitude I took. I believe that there were two questions, one by my hon. friend from New Westminster and one by the hon. member for Quebec South.

Mr. POWER: For some unaccountable reason the question was dropped from the order paper.

Mr. MANION: I had nothing to do with its being dropped from the order paper, but I presume the reason was that it was exactly the same as the question asked by the hon. member for New Westminster and which was voted down. I saw it myself and there was practically no difference between the two:

Similarly, on April 19, 1926, Hon. Mr. Dunning, as minister, replied to a question by Mr. Fraser as to tie purchases by Canadian National Railways in British Columbia. Mr.

Dunning gave the number purchased, and the names of the parties supplying, but, in the matter of price, stated:

"It is not considered to be in the public interest to furnish this information."

On March 15, 1926, Hon. Mr. Robb, Acting Minister of Railways, dealt with the following question by Mr. Macdonald of Richmond—Hansard, 1530, 1926:

1. What quantities and descriptions of material were bought for the use of the Canadian National Railways during the year 1925?

2. What portion of said goods were iron, steel or metal products and what textiles?

3. From whom were said goods purchased and at what prices?

4. What quantities of fuel and lubricating oils were purchased by the Canadian National Railways, where these purchased, what prices were paid, where was delivery made to the railways?

Hon. Mr. Robb: The Canadian National Railway board and management hold strongly that it is not in the public interest, and would be injurious to Canadian National Railways, to bring down information such as that sought by Mr. Macdonald, and having to do with the purchase of materials and supplies. Even were it a proper principle to adopt, it would be a matter of great difficulty and expense to compile such a statement. In addition, it is information which conceivably might result in increased prices of material and supplies, and consequent increased operating cost of the railway. It has been found that commercial houses and industrial organizations tendering on railway requirements hesitate to submit their best prices when there is likelihood of the same being divulged."

On the same page of Hansard, Mr. Johnstone asked for similar information as to coal purchases. Hon. Mr. Robb gave the names of the supplying companies, but as to the amount contracted for with each company, the price, and the tonnage actually taken, gave the following answer:

"2, 3 and 4. The management consider that it would not be in the public interest, would be injurious to National Railways, and an embarrassment in future negotiations to publish contracts, prices and deliveries, as called for by these questions."

Possibly these citations are sufficient to indicate the general attitude of the late government in regard to these matters.

Mr. VENIOT: There is a difference between the situation at that time and the situation to-day. At that time both railways were in competition in the purchase of ties, but in 1930 and 1931, owing to the depression, the railways got together and decided upon the same average price.

Mr. MANION: They have done so every year.

Mr. VENIOT: Not in 1925, 1926 and 1927.

Mr. MANION: I am informed that they did.