

Conditions in the West

Anti-Wheat Speculation Bill Introduced.—Slow Wheat Markets.—
Grain Congestion at the Head of Lakes.—Flax Statistics.—
Labor Situation.

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At the present session of the Manitoba Legislature, D. A. Ross member for St. Clements and a prominent real estate man, has given notice of introducing a bill to make speculation in options illegal. This bill will be supported by G. H. J. Malcom, one of the members for a rural constituency and a prominent grain grower.

The extremely high prices of wheat during the present season have tempted the outside public to an unusual degree, and the very rapid fluctuations have resulted in many of them losing their money, and they are correspondingly sore. Mr. Malcom suggests the imposition of a tax on speculators, claiming that if they have to pay some such sum as \$25 before they could trade, it would have a deterrent effect. There is no manner of doubt that the farmers have been among the worst offenders in the matter of reckless speculation this year. Days when experienced grain men never dreamed of touching the market, the outside speculator and more especially the farmer, rushed in, and of course they are the people who invariably squeal the loudest when they are hurt.

Millers.

H. B. Dobell, western manager for the Ogilvie Milling Company, gave evidence before the commission inquiring into the high cost of living to day. He denied stoutly that there was any combine among the millers to raise the prices, and blamed the advance in flour entirely to the high cost of wheat. In the course of his evidence, Mr. Dobell informed the commission that his company had exported every barrel of flour made since 14th December, he was silent when asked if these were war orders, but stated later that during the past year, from 40 to 50 per cent of all flour milled by them had been exported. He affirmed that if the small bakers were to continue in business, the price of the loaf would have to go up.

Markets.

The markets in the last two days have been materially affected by the submarine activities, and the market is extremely dull and narrow. The writer has been on the Winnipeg Exchange for nearly 16 years and has never before known of so many prominent men being off the trading floor during January. The fact that buying is done almost through one company is not wholly responsible for the dullness, some of it is due to the tremendous congestion of traffic and the slow movement of grain. The following dispatch just received from Port William, Ont., tells its own tale: "There is a congestion of grain at the head of the lakes, all the elevators are full up and it is impossible therefore to unload any more cars at the grain plants. Cars are being spotted in the railway yards designated to which elevator they are to be switched when there may be room for the unloading of the grain."

The reason for this congestion is that there is so much poor grade wheat coming down and it takes up more room in the bins than wheat of better grade hitherto has.

It is not permissible now to mix any of this grain, each grade requiring a separate bin. In the meantime, the railways by all rail shipments are doing their best to relieve the situation, the Canadian Pacific is handling about 75 cars a day east, and the Canadian Northern a similar number, and the Canadian Government Railway about fifty cars a day.

Weather has been very bad in the country and receipts of country elevators have been small. Charles H. Thornton who has for some years been regarded as one of the grain exchange authorities on flax, has issued some very interesting figures showing that in 1913 the shipment of flax from India, Argentina, United States, Canada and Russia amounted to the grand total of 73,980,000 bushels. In that year Argentina contributed over 41,000,000 bushels while in 1916 her contribution had shrunk to a little over 18,000,000. Figuring the Canadian surplus in store in terminals and in the farmers' hands at 4,900,000 bushels, the available seed in sight is only 23,400,000 in the United States, Argentina and Canada. This means that there is a shortage of 4,000,000 to 5,000,000 bushels based on

average requirements of 7,000,000 to 8,000,000 bushels shortage, as compared with the crop of 1915. Taken from any point of view it looks as if a moderate acreage in flax would be a good thing for the coming season.

Labor Situation.

Last week the various breed associations of Manitoba and the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association held their annual meetings in Brandon, and the Breeders Association of the Province of Saskatchewan held their annual meeting in Saskatoon. At all of these meetings the labor situation was discussed. The Manitoba breeders passed a very strong resolution asking for conscription, in some form of foreign labor. The foreign laborer of every nationality has been taking full advantage of the condition created by so large a number of our men having gone to war. They are practically refusing to work at all in the winter, and are asking exorbitant wages for the coming spring and the situation is serious in view of the active need for production.

There is a fair amount of summer fallow land ready for seed, but there is practically no fall ploughing, the season having been wet and this means that even under the most favorable conditions acreages in wheat should be curtailed, to some extent this will not be any special drawback if there is time and help to get the land in good shape to seed to coarse grains; but should the spring be late and unfavorable it will mean that all varieties of cereals will be curtailed. Much of the help which is in the country, even if willing to work at reasonable wages, is not of a high degree of efficiency and the amount that will be accomplished will be considerably less than from the same number of workers of a higher degree of efficiency, and with the spur of a really loyal desire to produce the country's best. As one man very aptly put it, "The best foreign worker you can hire is a mighty poor substitute for your own son."

Some idea of the way in which the farmers of Manitoba have responded to the call for men for the army may be gathered from the fact that in one breeders' meeting where there were 45 men present, 40 of them had sons at the front.

Live Stock.

Livestock prices have been soaring and new high records have been made especially in hogs. A large number of hogs sold this morning at \$13.25 per cwt., while yesterday over 500 changed hands at \$12.15. These high priced hogs were mainly purchased for Toronto packing houses. Beef prices have also been exceptionally high, and there have been a number of sales at \$9 per cwt. for steers, cows have sold freely from \$7.50 to \$8, and bulls from \$6.25 to \$7.50, while a number of stockers and feeders have changed hands at \$6.50. The farmers are, of course, rejoicing at the high prices, but the city consumer with a salary that does not expand as really appalled at the price. Bacon retails, sliced, at 46 cents per pound while loin chop of pork sells at 33 cents.

Scottish Co-operative.

It has been known in grain circles for some time that when the directors of the English and Scottish Co-operative Societies were in Canada last fall, part of their business was to secure land on which their own company would produce crops. During the past week they announce the success of their negotiations. They have purchased in Saskatchewan, 27 miles south of Rosetown on the Saskatoon-Calgary branch of the Canadian Northern, 10,000 acres. The major portion of this has already been under cultivation, it having been farmed by an American company. All the land which is ready, and which can be ploughed next spring will be seeded, mainly in wheat, though there will be a proportion of oats, barley and flax. This is to be a straight "producer to consumer" proposition as the grain will be shipped through the companies' own elevators to their own mills in Scotland and England for grinding. It is quite likely that the land purchases of this company will be extended in the very near future, they have looked at land both in Manitoba and Alberta and it is generally understood that they hope to acquire land in both of these provinces as well as in Saskatchewan.

The farm in Saskatchewan will be under the di-

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rect management of Superintendent Howes, who is an American of English descent, and the general supervision will be in charge of George Fisher, the Canadian representative of the Scottish Co-operative, who has charge of the companies' business on the Winnipeg Grain Exchange.

GAIN IN GRAIN TRADE ON GREAT LAKES.

The tremendous business handled last year by lake vessels is emphasized by the annual report of the Lake Carriers' Association, which declares "that the ore movement in 1916 was 64,734,198 tons, as against 49,070,478 tons in the hitherto banner year of 1913."

The report adds, however, that, although contract ore rates were increased 10 cents a ton a last year, "the boats made very little money," because "operating expenses were so greatly increased."

It is stated, however, that "the outlook for 1917 is roseate," because, after a lapse of sixteen years, the ore rate of \$1 a ton from ports at the head of Lake Superior has been re-established.

The Great Lakes grain trade in 1916 totalled 363,999,155 bushels, a decrease of 22,166,896 bushels from 1915. The report adds that the grain rates were the most "significant feature of the year's trade" as the average rate per bushel for the season was 4 1/4 cents, compared with 2 1/4 cents the preceding year.

Seventy-three lives and fourteen vessels were lost on the Great Lakes during the season of 1916. This heavy casualty record is the most serious since 1913, when a fearful November storm claimed the greatest toll of lives and of ships in the history of inland navigation.

TO DEVELOPE MINERAL RESOURCES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA.

Mr. H. C. Brewster, Premier of British Columbia, states that he has been successful in securing financial assistance towards the development of the immense mineral resources of the province. The matters which required immediate attention were the establishment of a steel plant which, with the vast amount of ore available, could be kept in operation for an indefinite time, and the erection of a smelting plant, which would greatly reduce the quantity of copper now going to the United States refineries.

THE NATIONAL TRUST CO.

The financial statement of National Trust Company, Ltd., for 1916 shows further expansion of a substantial sort, total assets under the company's administration, rising to \$69,197,054, against \$59,332,485 at the end of 1915. They are more than three times the assets reported by the company seven years ago.

The principal gain last year was in "estates, trust and agency" accounts, the funds and investments under this heading standing at \$58,651,752, an increase of well on to \$9,500,000. The company's guaranteed trust account also continued to grow.

In the Superior Court, at Quebec, Hon. Justice Dorion rendered judgment in the case of Geo. Tanguay, Ltd., against the Great Northwestern Telegraph Company, an action claiming \$1,237.50, damages from defendant for the non-transmission of a telegram and by which fact the plaintiff claims he suffered losses. The court dismissed the claim with costs.