

Conditions in the West

By E. CORA HIND.

Calgary, January 26, 1918.

I have been here all week attending the Annual Convention of the United Farmers of Alberta. There were 1,000 registered delegates, men and women, and these represented an actual membership of over 10,000. In a Province so sparsely populated as Alberta this is an enormous factor, and the deliberations of this body are of national importance. Of course, a convention so large is necessarily unwieldy and much time is lost in its deliberations, and many fool resolutions came before it and some of them are passed—and many of them are tabled. But on the big questions of the war, the need of production, the necessity of organizing labor with the determination that Oriental labor shall not be employed, the question of railway freight rates, the need of free farm implements and labor saving devices for the home, the Convention took strong and sane grounds.

On the question of the need of any advance in railroad freight rates, every last delegate appeared to have arrived from Missouri—they certainly will have to be shown that there is any such need.

H. W. Wood, who is president, is also President of the Canadian Council of Agriculture, and is a mem-

ber of the Board of Grain Supervisors. He has been closely in touch with the Government all year and in his annual address he made a very powerful appeal to the members of the U.F.A. to produce regardless of prices, warning them that if they failed to do so they would be discredited forever in the eyes of the world. Later in the Convention, these delegates as a body pledged themselves unequivocally to this work of production.

Nothing of a startling nature is going on in either grain or live stock circles and the West at the present time is very much given up to the holding of Annual Conventions, but this is very much as it should be. This is the season when the West lays its plans for production and the increased note of seriousness with regard to the war situation is very marked at every gathering so far held.

Western Canada has been, perhaps, slow in realizing her full responsibility with regard to the war—more especially in the line of production, but at last she seems to be fully awake and great things may be expected from her in the line of both grain and meat production during the coming nine months.

The Supply of Foodstuffs

Commissioner at Ottawa reports cold storage concerns holding large supplies

PRESENT PRICE OF EGGS UNWARRANTED.

Ottawa, January 30.—“Unjustifiable over-accumulation of eggs held at unjustifiable prices.” This is the main conclusion reached by W. F. O'Connor, K.C., Cost of Living Commissioner of the Minister of Labor in a special report he has prepared on the food stocks held by packing and cold storage companies in Canada. Mr. O'Connor states that excepting hana, smoked meats, mutton and lamb, which show decreases, there is substantially more meat, eggs, butter and cheese in Canada now than at the same period of last year. Of cheese, Mr. O'Connor finds that there was 70 per cent more in storage than on January 1, 1917. He cannot justify the contention that there is a shortage of butter in Canada nor the prevailing price of that article.

But it is in regard to eggs that Mr. O'Connor takes a strong stand. He declares that, in his opinion, “the ruling prices for eggs are absolutely unjustifiable and the daily reiteration in the market reports that a shortage of eggs exists is contrary to the fact. There exists an unjustifiable over-accumulation of eggs held at unjust prices.

There is no demand for export or possibility of exporting such holdings and they should be forced on the market right away while they remain fit for food, so that those who consume them may derive from them that sustenance which otherwise they will need in fat and meats.

THIS YEAR AND LAST.

Mr. O'Connor gives in tabulated form, month by month, the quantities of foodstuffs held in storage and the percentage of increase or decrease. The figures for January 1st, 1918, as compared with the same date last year, show the following increases or decreases per cent:

Butter, increase 12 per cent.
Cheese, increase 70 per cent.
Eggs, increase 48 per cent.
Beef, fresh and pickled, increase 6 per cent.
Pork, fresh and pickled, increase 8 per cent.
Bacon, ham and smoked meats, decrease 8 per cent.
Mutton and lamb, decrease 19 per cent.
Fish of all kinds, increase 14 per cent.

The Cost of Living Commissioner does not maintain that the increased accumulation shown by his tables is a matter for adverse criticism, except in the case of one or two commodities.

“Canada.” Mr. O'Connor states, “has necessarily assumed a large proportion of the task of feeding the Allies, and, in order to maintain a larger outflow of food products, it is necessary to build up a larger supply. The cold storage and packing concerns form the dam out of which the larger than usual flow of food exports is periodically loosened as shipping opportunities enable. It has been necessary, as it has become proper, to enlarge the capacity of the dam. The relative decrease in holdings of bacon, ham and

smoked meats shown in the table is explained by a decided falling off in exports of these commodities. They are being replaced by pork. Exports of pork in December, 1917, were as great as the total exports of that commodity for the last six months of 1916. Exports of beef are largely increasing. December shipments were light, but November's were several million pounds greater than the total beef exports for the last six months of 1916.

“The cheese situation is anomalous. There was seventy per cent more cheese in storage on January 1st, 1918, than on the same date in 1917. December shipments had been very light, probably because of lack of shipping. There is an acute shortage of cheese in England. If shipping becomes available the excess holdings will be released for export, but if the shipping is not procurable then in the judgment of the Commissioner, a proportion of this food ought to be placed at the disposal of the Canadian public at a price which will induce its consumption within Canada.”

ALLEGED “EGG SCARCITY.”

In regard to butter, Mr. O'Connor states that there were two million pounds less exported during the last five months of 1917 than during the equivalent period of 1916.

Following his remarks on eggs, Mr. O'Connor indicates the general whereabouts of certain egg stocks. He adds,

“The allegation that there is a scarcity of eggs, justifying even a further advance in prices, comes most frequently from Montreal. The eggs held by the packing companies of the province of Quebec who report to the Commissioner were, on January 1 of last year, 640,956 dozens. These same packing companies held, on January 1, 1918, no less than 1,036,613 dozens. Ontario figures are 312,961 dozens on January 1, 1917, and 643,795 dozens on January 1, 1918. The Manitoba holdings were on January 1 of last year, 319,222 dozens, and on January 1 of this year, 932,250 dozens. These examples of an ‘egg scarcity’ represent holdings 62 per cent, 105 per cent, and 192 per cent, respectively, in addition to the equivalent of the full quantities of their egg stocks of January, 1917.

“I can, of course, supply the names and locations of every company which holds these stocks, but I trust that this statement, without anything more is sufficient to dissipate the theory of an egg shortage in Canada, and to lead to an immediate unloading at reasonable prices of these stocks, otherwise they should be seized and sold before they rot, because the time is rapidly approaching when, according to the course of nature, notwithstanding science, eggs stored in April, May, June, July and August, as most or nearly all of these stocks were, will not carry into March as fit human food.”

PRODUCE AND EGG MEN'S ANSWER TO O'CONNOR CHARGES.

Steps were taken by the Montreal Produce Merchants' Association and the Montreal Egg Dealers Association to reply to the statements recently published by Mr. W. F. O'Connor, Cost of Living Commissioner, regarding the alleged hoarding of butter and eggs in Canada, and particularly in Montreal. Special meetings of both associations were held as a result of which it was decided to send letters to Hon. T. W. Crothers, Minister of Labor, setting forth the exact position in Montreal regarding both butter and eggs, in order to correct wrong impressions that might result from the figures published by Mr. O'Connor.

“Dear Sir,—At a meeting of the Montreal Produce Merchants' Association, held to-day, Mr. O'Connor's figures, representing the stocks of butter, were discussed and in view of the possibility of a wrong impression emanating therefrom I have been instructed to place before you the following facts:

“While this association is not in a position to criticize officially the total stocks of butter held in Canada, there is no question whatever that the stocks of butter held in Montreal on 1st January, 1918, were less than January, 1917.

“I was also requested to point out to you that Mr. O'Connor in all his statements regarding produce seems to take no cognizance of the importation of products that Canada has been dependent upon for many years past. Most of these importations arrive in Canada during the winter months. It is rather an incongruous fact that Canada for many years past has been an importer as well as an exporter of butter. From figures supplied officially we understand that during the years 1911 to 1914 inclusive Canada exported annually, approximately three million pounds of butter and imported annually, approximately, six million pounds of butter. We have taken these figures from the record that Mr. Fisher at Washington apparently has in his possession and which were produced as typical of the general butter situation prior to the war.

EXPORTS FOR ALLIES.

“I am to point out to you that since the war started demands have been made upon Canada for the exportation of butter for the Allies and that during the month of January there have been a good few orders in the Montreal market for export, which have considerably depleted stocks. In proof of this, according to official returns of stocks to-day, the total amount of creamery butter in Montreal is only 38,289 packages and of dairy butter 2,104 packages, as against 48,763 creamery and 1,410 dairy last year, and a large proportion of the dairy and creamery butter which appears in the stocks to-day has been sold for export and is awaiting ocean transportation.

“Mr. O'Connor's figures would appear to convey to the public the impression that the visible supply would all be available for consumption in Canada. Such is not the case. The Montreal Produce Merchants' Association feels that to-day there is nothing like sufficient butter to supply the consuming public in Canada between now and 1st May, and if the present export demand continues the shortage between now and 1st May will be most serious.

“We are inclined to think that Ontario is also lightly stocked with butter, as orders have been received on the Montreal market this week from Toronto firms. The eastern provinces also look to Montreal for their supply.

“It must not be forgotten that most of the butter which Canada imported in the years quoted above came from New Zealand, and during the winter months; in fact, the general consensus of opinion seems to be, that, approximately, 95 per cent of the six million pounds which were imported annually were from New Zealand. This supply has been cut off completely.

“The facts are, therefore, in view of the present demand for Canadian butter for export and the limited supply available through all these imports being cut off, that we are face to face with the probability that prices may be forced unduly high, which, in the spring time would cause a serious decline in the production of cheese, which will be badly wanted by the Allies, owing to the possible high price of butter as compared with cheese. Quite a large percentage of our cheese factories are equipped so as to permit of their either making cheese or butter, whichever pays them best.

“I would also point out that there was a large shrinkage in the manufacture of both butter and cheese for the season of 1917, mainly brought about by the condensed milk factories and the large exportations of cream and milk to United States points.

“We feel it most unfortunate, in view of this large reduction in our make and the cutting off of imports,

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