FARMER VITALLY CONCERNED IN RAILROADS

What The European War Means To The American Farmer

That every city of any size in the country is full of thousands of idle men at the present moment is a fact well known to every reader of newspapers—for hardly a day passes that the press is not full of comment about the hungry thousands who stand in the "bread line" in every large center of population. Nor is this state of affairs due to the policy of any particular political party, but rather the outgrowth of conditions which have been slowly but surely crystalizing for a number of years. In the first place, the Corn Belt—the great bread basket of the nation—has had a series of slim crops in most sections, and this naturally has had a depressing effect upon business conditions. Again, we have been passing through a period of industrial readjustment—of changing from the loose methods which prevailed a dozen or so years ago over to a policy of strict government control of public service corporations and a sharp inquiry into the conduct of all other large corporations—and in trying to stamp out the abuses of the past, the pendulum has swung so far in the other direction that so far as the railroads are concerned, at least, it threatens to precipitate the most of them which are not already in the hands of receivers upon the rocks of financial wreck and ruin.

That the depressed financial condition of the railroads is largely responsible for the great army of unemployed was vividly demonstrated by a prominent St. Louis newspaper the other day when it showed that nine St. Louis manufacturing establishments which deal in railroad supplies employed 14,673 men one year ago, whereas now they employ only 4,503, with a reduction in their payrolls amounting to $588,700 per month, or over seven million dollars a year. If the effect upon only nine enterprises is as far reaching as this what would the figures show if they were available for similar industries and the other hundreds of enterprises affected in a greater or less degree throughout the country? Nearly all of these concerns have on hand hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of finished equipment which was ordered by the railroads a year or so ago, but which they have not been able to pay for; in the meantime, not being able to pay for goods already ordered, the railroads are not placing any new contracts, and unless they receive speedy assistance from the Interstate Commerce Commission and the rate-making authorities of the different states the tendency will be for labor conditions to grow gradually worse rather than better.

In last week's article we referred to the fact that the railroads are the largest employers of labor in the United States and that during the last fiscal year they paid out over thirteen hundred million dollars in wages to the army of men and women who conduct their business. We also referred to the fact that they paid out almost a thousand million dollars for steel, coal, lumber and other supplies, of which they are the largest consumers in the country, and therefore the chief support of the hundreds of thousands employed in these great industries.

In view of these facts, is it not plain to any think man that it is of tremendous importance to the whole country that the railroads be permitted to earn a reasonable income if the millions of American laboring men are to be kept profitably employed?

Does not any man know that if the thousands who are this moment hunting for work in Chicago, St. Louis, New York, Pittsburgh, Cleveland and other large cities were profitably employed that it would mean a higher price for what the farmer has to sell and that it would be reflected in the receipts of every merchant and the output of every factory in the nation?

In view of such a serious state of affairs, can the average farmer of business man afford to oppose the small increase in rates which is necessary to once more put the Is not the amount of passenger fare or freight which the average citizen pays out during the year a mere bagatelle when measured against the lucrative employment and the buying power of the millions of American laboring men?

Another Serious Phase.

Important as is the employment of labor, there is another phase of this problem which calls for profound thought at the hands of all thinking citizens, and especially the farmer. In last week's article we cited the fact that in their desperate efforts to make both ends meet, many railroads are "burning the candle at both ends"—that in order to bolster up their securities and keep out of the hands of receivers the rolling stock and roadbeds of many lines have been deteriorating rapidly for a number of years and hence are in no position to handle a big season's tonnage, should the strain of a heavy crop year suddenly descend upon them. That the great foreign war will produce the highest prices ever known for the foodstuffs produced by the farmer is admitted on all hands, and if there ever was a time when he will need adequate and efficient shipping facilities it will be during the next two or three years—and yet we are actually facing perhaps the most prosperous period the American farmer has ever known with many American railroads in a dilapidated physical condition. No sooner had the great European war burst upon the world than Congress realized that our merchant marine was utterly weak and inefficient. Steps were at once taken to make the best of the situation and to repair as speedily as possible our neglected shipping facilities upon the high seas—and that the handicap has already cost the American people millions of dollars during the last few months is so patent that it requires no extended comment. It is one thing to have markets in all parts of the world which have heretofore been supplied by the great warring nations begging for American goods and foodstuffs—but it is quite another thing to have American ships in which to deliver these cargoes.

Will we now add to the neglect of an adequate merchant marine the further folly of permitting our railroads to get into such a weakened physical condition that they will break down under the strain of delivering the products of the farmer and the manufacturer at our ocean ports and thus largely waste the great opportunity for profit which the foreign war will unquestionably bring us? This is a phase of the present situation which commands the serious thought of every farmer in Kansas and the Corn Belt generally—for here is where the lion's share of the nation's foodstuffs are produced and here is where farmers cannot afford to be hampered by inadequate transportation facilities if they are to make the most of favorable market opportunities.

There is not a single manager of a Central of Western railroad who will not admit that the present supply of first-class freight locomotives and box cars could not successfully meet the requirements of several bountiful crop years—and yet they haven't the funds with which to supply this equipment and thus be prepared for the emergency when it comes—as it undoubtedly will.

Farmers Will Profit.

In this connection, it is opportune to say that the American farmer is certain to reap a larger tions which exist in Europe than any other class of tradesmen or citizen. So far as our manufacturers are concerned, while new markets are undoubtedly beckoning to the United States, yet on the other hand, for several years to come, the splendid trade which we enjoyed in Germany, England, France, Austria and Russia on our manufactured products is certain to remain demoralized—and thus we will be fortunate if we do not lose more than we can hope to gain in new fields, with whose needs we are not yet familiar, and to which it is certain to require some years to adjust ourselves.

It is the American farmer, however, who has no complications ahead of him, and whose flour, pork, beef, mutton and other food- to make up the shortage which is already looming big in the distance because the harvest fields of the most fertile sections of Europe have been converted into a shambles for the contending armies. Exports of breadstuffs from the United States in November were valued at $40,250,000, or almost four times as much as in November of last year, while meat and cattle exports amounted to nearly $14,000,000, or a gain of over 20 per cent over last year, and this despite our miserable shipping facilities on the high seas.

In the light of these facts, was there ever a time when the farmers of Kansas and other Corn Belt states can view the future with as much assurance, or when they can so well afford to treat fairly every other great industry in the nation as now?

Putting it in the terms of sound business policy, was there ever a time when they should do their part to the end that American labor may be profitably employed in all the great channels of industry, and that our transportation system may be kept up to a high point of efficiency, so that it may adequately discharge the heavy shipping burdens which will undoubtedly descend upon it in the not distant future?

No other single agency in the nation has had more to do with the advancement of land values than have the railroads, and as evidence of this fact, the proximity of a farm to the market almost invariably fixes its selling value. Kansas and every other Central and Western state is still in dire need of hundreds of miles of additional railroad mileage, and these new lines will not be built until American railroad securities are re-established as a paying investment—and this, on the basis of present railroad earnings, is out of the question. Nearly all our present lines were built years ago, when railroad investments were looked upon with favor at home and abroad, and hence, if there is a class of citizens in the land who should be vitally interested in rescuing the railroads from the pitiable plight in which they find themselves at the present moment it is the farmer. As a matter of fact, were it not so tremendously far-reaching in its effect, the controversy over a slight increase in railroad rates would largely resemble a tempest in a tea pot—a matter which should be settled in the brief space of time required to apply the remedy. When a private industry, great or small, advances the price of its commodities we take it as a matter of course and say nothing about it—and in the past we have opposed a square deal for the railroads largely because the people did not understand their importance to the nation, because they were angered at occasional abuses which strict governmental regulation has forever eliminated and because for some years designing political opportunists have found abuse of the railroads an easy road to public preferment. That public sentiment, however, is changing rapidly and that we will soon reach a sane understanding between the people and the railroads, which are so vitally essential to the agricultural and commercial progress of every community in the nation, is becoming more and more apparent every day. (Paid adv. To be continued.)

Editor James Townsley came up from Ellinwood last Thursday evening to spend Christmas and for a visit over Sunday with his wife and the kiddies.

Buy your wife or daughter that piano you have been promising them for years. We have a larger stock than we care to carry and are going to get rid of them regardless of price. We can arrange for easy payments if you so desire.—Hooper Drug Co., The Rexall Store.

Superintendent Senter of the city schools, who has been on the sick list for the past two weeks, is still confined to his home and it will be several days yet before he will be able to resume his work.

Dr. Charles Hooper came in from San Francisco last week to spend his Christmas, with home folks, Mr. and Mrs. C. A. Hooper and family, and left Saturday for St. Louis to attend to some business matters before returning to his work as one of the instructors in the medical department of the Affiliated College in San Francisco. The folks here did not know that he was contemplating coming home at this time and the surprise was a most joyful one.

See Zudora at the Echo Theatre next Friday, January 8.