

Supply—Justice

a case in the Supreme Court of Canada just recently in the interests of his province. It is the practice still in the United Kingdom for the attorney general of that country to go into court and prosecute cases in the courts of the United Kingdom. I feel, therefore, that the general conclusion my hon. friend is trying to draw is entirely unwarranted by the circumstances.

Mr. Hardie: I just wonder if I could ask if the attorney general acted as political agent of some political candidate or some political party?

Mr. Fulton: My hon. friend, with his broad political experience, would probably be better able to answer that question than I am.

Item agreed to.

Combines Investigation Act—

156. Restrictive trade practices commission, \$86,110.

Mr. Howard: I have a couple of questions with respect to this particular vote, Mr. Chairman. I wonder whether it might be acceptable to the committee if we followed somewhat the same practice that we followed in the last session, in considering vote 156 and at the same time making some reference to the office of investigation and research under this branch set out in vote 157, because the two of them are interconnected to a degree.

Mr. Fulton: Yes.

The Deputy Chairman: Is the committee agreeable to that procedure?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Howard: I wonder whether, preceding any formal comments on the item, I might inquire of the minister at this time what he is able to report in so far as the report of the restrictive trade practices commission is concerned with regard to the sugar industry in western Canada. From the last inquiry I made about this matter I understood that the question had been referred to a lawyer—I forget his name; I believe it was Meighen of Brandon, Manitoba—with instructions to proceed to prosecute and that if he found in the course of preparing this case that the circumstances and the facts did not warrant prosecution, he was not to proceed. I wonder whether the minister could bring us up to date on what is going on in that particular case.

Mr. Fulton: Counsel appointed has been in consultation with the department over quite an extensive period. I am under some disadvantage here because I am not sure the companies concerned have been advised of the present position. Before announcing a decision which affects them I rather feel that

I should ensure that they themselves know what the situation is. Would the hon. gentleman perhaps give me time enough to ascertain what is the position with respect to our having given advice to the companies concerned?

Mr. Howard: May I ask the minister whether he means to spend a few moments now trying to ascertain that matter or at some later date? I do not want to take up the time of the committee now if it is going to take a few moments time to find that out. But if it can be done and the house can be advised at a later date, perhaps on the orders of the day by question or something of that nature, that procedure would be perfectly satisfactory.

Mr. Fulton: I am advised that I have already said in the house, either explicitly or impliedly, that prosecution has been authorized in this case. Since that time there have been consultations as to the form of indictment and that is being worked out and either has been laid or will be laid shortly.

Mr. Howard: I have just one or two comments beyond that. One has to do with what appears to be an exceptionally long period of time that elapses by the procedures set out under the Combines Investigation Act before proceeding to a final conclusion. In many cases some length of time appears to elapse in the initial investigation. I suppose this is quite correct, because in investigating such charges as the operation of a combine, price fixing arrangements and so on, certainly it is desirable to have all the information that can be obtained; and there is no objection to the length of time it takes to get that particular information and to complete the investigation.

The next step makes me wonder whether or not there is sufficient staff in the branch to deal with the question. I refer to the period of time which elapses after the completing of the investigation conducted by the office of the director of investigation and research, between the time that investigation ceases and the time the statement of evidence is submitted to the parties involved. I have in mind particularly one that was completed just recently, notably that involving the question of the sale of raw fish in British Columbia. I understand that the statement of evidence was mailed just within the last month to the parties concerned; yet the whole process of investigation started and apparently was completed some time ago. An inordinately long period of time appears to have elapsed between the conclusion of the investigation itself and the mailing or the completion of the statement of evidence to the parties concerned.