

*Combines Investigation Act*

This whole price discussion started in 1948 with a committee of the house set aside to debate it. From that, a royal commission was set up. Then the MacQuarrie committee was established to study, supposedly, the findings of the royal commission, and to carry forward the study of the Combines Investigation Act.

Then, this fall, just before the beginning of the session, apparently the Minister of Justice (Mr. Garson) was very anxious to get a report from the MacQuarrie committee, and asked that committee to give him an interim report with respect to combines legislation or, more particularly, price maintenance practices.

During the debate in reply to the speech from the throne the Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) made this very clear statement on October 15, as reported at page 42 of *Hansard*:

I do not think that is going to have a very substantial effect on the index of the cost of living.

That was very plain. It was a plain statement by the Prime Minister to the effect that, although the government was bringing forward this legislation, he did not believe it would have any great effect on the cost of living.

However, instead of bringing down the legislation earlier in the session the government set up another committee of the House and the Senate to study further, at tremendous cost to the country, this proposition. What did this committee accomplish? It served only to confuse the issue and failed to make any material contribution or provide any enlightenment on the question. What happened yesterday can be described only as a club being held over the heads of members of our party.

Being a farmer I was interested in the brief presented by the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, as was the hon. member for Rosthern (Mr. Boucher), but not quite from the same angle. I cannot understand the attitude taken by the Canadian Federation of Agriculture in connection with this particular matter. I should like to quote what I think is a very significant statement which appears in the brief, as follows.

The government of Canada for many years has recognized that modern industry has produced a set of conditions which are radically different from, let us say, a hundred years ago, when economic activity was based largely on relatively small industrial units in active competition with one another. The steady growth of large scale business concerns has tended to create concentrations of economic power which fosters the growth of monopolistic competition or imperfect competition rather than the simple competition of classical economic theory.

I think you, sir, and other members of this house, will agree with that old saying

[Mr. Charlton.]

that it is the little things that count. The very foundation of our country and of democracy is the little things. They are the backbone of any nation. The little farmers, the little businesses, the little industries, the little communities; they are the things that count. What has happened? In the last few years big farmers have been buying up little farmers; big business has been absorbing little businesses; big industries are buying up little industries; big communities are swallowing up little communities.

The normal business practice over the past one hundred years—it will probably be the same in the future—has been to eliminate opposition. This process has been speeded up considerably in the last few years, apparently with the blessing of this government. Is it that the government are not satisfied, and we are now being asked to add legislation to the statute books in this hasty manner which obviously will accelerate that procedure and centralize to the extreme?

This in effect is nothing more than "mail-order catalogue legislation" brought in by the now tabulated minister of make-believe to quiet down public concern over the increasing cost of living. The Prime Minister (Mr. St. Laurent) and one other member that I know of—I heard him say it—have indicated that it will have very little effect on the cost of living.

The federation of agriculture has always tried to get more stable markets for agricultural products by fixing the prices of various commodities. That has been the policy of our farm organizations for years, and I agree with it. But what has been sauce for the goose should be sauce for the gander. We cannot make fish of the one and flesh of the other. It is significant that at a time when we are moving toward the acceptance of policies designed to give price stability in the field of agricultural products a measure should come before this parliament that would outlaw such practices in another field.

Agricultural price legislation was brought into being after many years of study, a more detailed study than has been given to this measure having to do with the field of retail prices. The agricultural price legislation was given the closest study by agricultural groups from British Columbia to the maritimes, and by government officials, provincial and federal, all across the country. In some cases it has resulted in legislation which serves to establish even the retail price to the consumer. If it is right and lawful in the one field, why is it not so in the other?