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PRINCIPAL CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE.

FREIGHT RATES AND THE STEAMSHIP COMBINE.

The suit brought against thirteen of the principal Atlantic carriers under the terms of the Sherman anti-trust law in the United States appears to be the beginning of what will prove one of the most interesting and important fights against an alleged combine. Among the companies concerned are the Allan Steamship and the Canadian Pacific Railway corporations. The Canadian Northern Steamship Company, the latest member of the Atlantic conference, is not included in the present suit. The thirteen ocean carriers are alleged to have entered into an illegal contract in 1908 by which they created a combine with power to apportion all traffic pro rata, impose heavy fines on members of the Conference for violation of any articles of agreement, and wage strenuous competition against outside lines.

As a result, it is stated that the Russian volunteer fleet was driven out of business, and that the Russian-American line was forced to become a member of the Conference. The present case is confined apparently to charges in connection with the traffic of steerage passengers, ninety per cent. of which, valued at $55,000,000 to the companies, is estimated to be controlled by the thirteen corporations. According to a statement of District Attorney Wise, it is alleged that, in order to eliminate and destroy competition, a committee of three agents was appointed with power to select steamships to be known as fighting steamers to sail at the same time and from the same port as competing vessels, and to advertise rates much below those of independent lines.

The steamship combine, as it is commonly called, has attracted attention in Canada on more than one occasion. When the Canadian Northern last spring inaugurated its Bristol-Montreal service, unofficial stories were heard that the new line would fight the combine, and speculation was rampant as to what would be the fate of the Canadian Northern vessels when pitted against specially directed competition. Rumors were settled when the Mackenzie-Mann ships joined the Conference.

Steerage traffic is only one consideration. That appealing most strongly to Canadian shippers and merchants is the question of freight rates. Early this year the North Atlantic Westbound Freight Conference proposed to increase materially the transportation charges for ocean freights from British to Canadian ports. This caused protests by the Toronto and Montreal Boards of Trade, by shippers generally, while Montreal importers asked for the appointment of a Royal Commission to investigate the action of the Conference. Mr. G. M. Bosworth, fourth vice-president of the Canadian Pacific Railway, at the time stated in London that ships lose money on the westbound trade cargoes. Later, a large delegation of Montreal importers waited upon the Dominion government respecting the proposed increased charges. This energetic opposition apparently had effect,