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UNION MEMBERS DISCUSS
THE ANTI-COMBINES BILL
AND ITS SHORTCOMINGS.

Mr. Coaker—Well, I think you should make the Act quite clear so that there will not be any misunderstanding about it.

Now, as regards to combines. The price of fish in 1911 started in the early part of the season at \$6.60 and fell to \$5.50. When it fell to \$5.50 we refused to sell. We called upon the fishermen all over the country to hold their fish for \$6.00. The fish went 50c lower and was quoted at \$5.00. We still refused to sell. Subsequently we got \$6.00 for it and afterwards it went to \$6.00.

Now the drop from \$6.60 to \$5.50 was agreed upon by some of the merchants. These men agreed to pay \$5.50 and no more. That is the kind of thing which has existed here, and if you go the right way about making the enquiry, you will find that there is a combine to-day fixing the price of kerosene oil, biscuits and also seals.

Salt Combine.
 Last year we had an example of this combine work as regards salt. We arranged with a merchant here in the early part of the season to give us a large quantity of salt. The price we quoted was \$1.15 a hhd. I went North for a while, and on my return I was notified that the price had gone to \$1.25, and that our order could not be supplied at \$1.15.

Well, instead of paying \$1.25 wholesale we imported a load of salt, and that load of salt cost us about \$1.05 a hhd. As soon as we commenced discharging our salt the price fell from \$1.25 to \$1.05. Who fixed the price at \$1.25?

Kerosene, we were notified last Spring, would be sold at 16 and 17 cents by dealers in St. John's. An agent of the Imperial Kerosene Oil Company came down here and offered it at a cent a gallon less. A couple of local buyers entered into a contract with them and the price of oil was immediately lowered.

Combine on Gasoline.
 Then there was a combine on gasoline. There is no doubt that you would have lots of trouble in getting at the proof of these things, but they can be found out. The men who work these things are very shrewd, and they work in a shrewd way, but there is no doubt that the prices of the articles to which I have referred are fixed by combine.

It has been stated, and I think truthfully, that money has been paid to manufacturers in order to get them to close up their manufacturing plants. I have been told that the Rennie Baking Co. receives \$5,000 a year in consideration of their not manufacturing biscuits. That company does not manufacture biscuits. They did it, but they do not do it now. I do not know what effect it would have on the market if they did manufacture them, but the probabilities are that the price of biscuit would be lower than it is now.

Two Concerns.
 The fact remains, however, that only two concerns in the Island at the present time manufacture biscuits.

Statements have also been made to the effect that a price was paid to a firm who had a seal manufacturing plant to keep that plant out of operation. I don't think that the firm is receiving the money now for the very simple reason that probably the plant is not in a condition to run but there was a day when they got \$5,000 not to operate.

At the present time you can only

sell seals to three firms in this country, Baine Johnston's, Job's and Bowring's. No matter what we believe seals to be worth we must take what those firms offer for them. If they say they are going to give \$4.50 a quintal for seals, it is impossible to get more. Large profits have been made in the manufacture of seals.

Was impossible.
 In considering the Sealing Bill at first in the F.P.U., we thought it might be possible to establish a Committee made up of two men from the Board of Trade and two from the Fishermen's Union to fix the price of seals, which Committee would have the right to know the cost of manufacturing and the profits which are made, but we found that it was not possible to do anything with the idea.

There is a monopoly in this matter. These men can pay what they like, and we are going to find that it will not be easy to get over the trouble. If you beg them hard enough, you may get 20 cents more, and if you organize a strike, as was done before, you may get 50 cents more, but I do not want to see any more strikes in this country.

We are going to try to get an increase in the price this Spring. If we coax them to give an extra 25 cents they may give it. There is not the slightest doubt that the seals are worth \$5.00. At the present time our business men are not going to be anxious to give us an increase, because they met some unexpected losses last year.

Serious Losses.
 It was not that the price of oil or seals was not high, but because some firms that handled the products that they went across went into liquidation, with the result that our business men met with serious losses.

I am glad to see this matter taken up by the Government, but they must go a little further. As the Hon. Leader of the Opposition has pointed out, when the Commission find on investigation that a combine exists, what are they going to do then? You must add a section providing some penalty or at least some way of dealing with the matter.

Now, with regard to coal. The Premier in his remarks stated that the price of coal in Sydney was \$3.25. That is the price to a man buying a hundred tons. The price to large dealers is \$3.00. A commission of 25c a ton is given when the dealer takes 5,000 tons. It is a little higher if they take larger quantities. Now, we did not get the drawback because we did not take 5,000 tons. If we did take that amount we would get that commission. Harvey and Morey get it. If we got the commission, our coal would cost us \$4.75 delivered to the wharf outside of freight. We sold for \$6.80, so that we got \$2.05 to cover freight.

Handling of Coal.
 Now, the point is, as the Premier said, that there are a lot of incidental expenses in connection with the handling of coal which we do not take into consideration at all, but at the same time we are able to bring coal here and sell at \$6.80 unless it advances in price.

Firms who are engaged in the coal business must make a large profit in order to cover expenses and to live out of it, and it is only right and proper that a man should be able to live well out of his business.

In order to help the poor people out, we are going next fall to try and get down a couple of loads of coal, and we hope to be able to sell at \$6.80

a ton. Of course, we must have a little more to cover freight than the ordinary dealer, because it takes us a little longer to discharge the boat.

For the Poor Man.

We are only going to sell to householders so as to give the poor man a chance. We may establish a Union in St. John's, and as we have a rule not to sell to anybody who is not a member of the Union, any people in St. John's who want to avail of our prices will have to join the Union, therefore it would soon follow that we would have large numbers joining in order to buy cheap coal; then where would Mr. Higgins be politically?

Now, Mr. Chairman, my only objection to the bill is that it does not go far enough. I think it should give the commissioners power to get after the men who are found to be acting in contravention to the spirit of the Act, and I trust that the Rt. Hon. introducer will do something in this connection.

Not Go Far Enough.
 Mr. Lloyd—Mr. Chairman, I may say that so far as this Bill goes, I am fully in accord with the principle but to my mind it does not go far enough in the direction of suggesting a remedy for any wrong which may be found to be in existence by trade combinations.

It is very clear, however, from the remarks of the Prime Minister, that the Government is not at present prepared to find such a remedy.

Section 1 of this Bill, defines a combine as being an arrangement or agreement amongst parties, which will have the effect of raising the price of articles to the detriment of the consumer. Every rise in price of goods is detrimental to the consumer.

The points raised by the hon. member, Mr. Coaker, as to whether the formation of the F.P.U. is not a combine under this act, is very debatable. In my opinion such an organization would come under this Bill.

F. P. U. Included.
 The F.P.U. is a body composed of sixteen or eighteen thousand fishermen, whose produce is for sale, and it is necessary for these men to get as much as they possibly can for it. If by agreement they can raise the price of their products, surely the consumer will have to pay that higher price, and that would be detrimental to the consumer.

What then is the difference between the case of those Union men and the coal dealers? By reason of the combination of the fishermen and of the coal dealers the consumers in each instance pay a higher price for fish and coal. Both cases come within the first section of this Bill.

I have very little sympathy with the coal dealers who combine to raise the price of coal, but I have every sympathy with those who try to raise the price of fish. I regard the second section as a very necessary one for the purpose of compelling the attendance of witnesses to give evidence on an enquiry into combines and monopolies.

Not Contemplated.
 I can readily understand that it is not contemplated to bring the F.P.U. under this Bill, for no Government would interfere with an organization with a membership of eighteen thousand men.

But the operations of coal dealers, biscuit manufacturers and others are in contemplation as objects of enquiries and investigations. It is to be hoped that manufacturers and others possessing political influence will not prevent the Government from making the fullest investigations, for such are found to be necessary.

As the Bill now stands, if a Commission reported the existence of a combine formed for the purpose of restricting competition in commerce, the Government would be helpless to

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I am prepared to support this Bill, but I regret to find that the Government is not in a position to go further and provide a remedy such as is in vogue in the United States and Canada.

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