

*Combines Investigation Act*

monopolies and trusts and mergers. The price spreads commission report, and the evidence published more recently in the daily papers of the hearings of the textile commission, make the people of this country generally realize that there should be some way of protecting the public.

Personally I think this legislation is a characteristic Liberal way of doing it—

Mr. LAPOINTE (Quebec East): Order.

Mr. WOODSWORTH: I am sure that a good Liberal like my friend the Minister of Justice (Mr. Lapointe) should take that as a compliment. I can conceive that, if the competitive system is a good thing, we must in some way seek to avoid unfair competition. But it strikes me that the Minister of Labour will find it very difficult in practice to decide where fair competition ends and unfair competition begins. As the committee know, from our standpoint it is next to impossible to do this, and we believe that the competitive system must ultimately give way to a cooperative system. But I suppose we cannot hope for a change in the present system so long as the Liberals are in the saddle.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: My hon. friend is giving an entirely wrong interpretation of Liberalism. Liberalism is not necessarily identified with the competitive system.

Mr. WOODSWORTH: I thought it was.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: My hon. friend is mistaken.

Mr. WOODSWORTH: I have heard in this house for sixteen years what Liberalism was, and I gathered the idea that it is very closely tied up with the competitive system. I am glad that apparently Liberalism is changing in that respect. This encourages us in this corner to renew our efforts in the days to come.

Mr. MacNICOL: It is getting worse.

Mr. WOODSWORTH: But in the meantime I simply say that I believe that legislation of this kind is distinctly in the right direction, if for no other reason than that it may show how difficult it is to administer in a society founded upon a competitive system.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: In a Liberal direction.

Mr. WOODSWORTH: Very well then, we will hope that Liberalism and socialism will not ultimately be so far apart. I have always taken the view that if you travel far enough in one direction, say eastward, you are bound to reach its extreme—you come to the west.

[Mr. Woodsworth.]

As to the protection of the public, while in theory it might be possible to maintain an absolutely neutral and unprejudiced position, in practice we have to remember that these great corporations have huge funds at their disposal; they are well organized, compact, and engage the ablest counsel in the country to plead their case; whereas on the other hand the consumer or the labouring man who works for the great corporation is comparatively unorganized and without any very great resources. Some special effort ought to be made—shall I say by a Liberal government?—to see that the interests of the unorganized public are very specially safeguarded.

Hon. H. A. STEWART (Leeds): I am sure the government are well aware of the very general complaint throughout the country that we have too much governmental machinery; that there is duplication, overlapping and waste; and that from time to time additional and unnecessary commissions are created in connection with the carrying on of government both in the provincial and the federal field.

Under the Dominion Trade and Industry Commission Act passed in 1935 the duty of investigation under the Combines Investigation Act was imposed upon the tariff board, an organization already in existence, with a trained and competent staff, and one which in the course of the discharge of its duties acquires a vast fund of knowledge relating to trade and industry in all its branches, including the effect of the tariff upon business.

There are those, of course, who contend that the tariff is responsible for many of these combinations. I submit that it would be hard to find a more competent organization than the tariff board, an organization better equipped, with a better background or with a greater command of information of the very sort that would be useful under this act. On the ground of expense alone I submit that we are making a mistake when, under this section, we contemplate the setting up of what appears to be a duplicate organization, with a duplicate staff, for the discharge of duties which I think might be well and properly discharged by this existing organization.

Perhaps that is putting it on the lowest ground, that of economy, which of course is important even at this time. I do urge upon the Minister of Labour, however, that this commission must possess a fund of information and an accumulation of knowledge in connection with the trade and industry of this country that would be very useful in connection with investigations of the character outlined by this act. In addition to saving the