

*Combines Investigation Act*

Mr. Fulton: Mr. Benidickson, I have misinformed you in an answer I gave. I find we did not have any provision with regard to export trade in our earlier bill, as presented to this house. We had it in several of the drafts we had prepared.

Mr. Benidickson: I was going to ask you why it was not in this bill when it was in last year's.

Mr. McIlraith: If you have finished with that point of export, I want to ask some more questions about subsection (3).—

And so on.

These excerpts indicate that in committee the minister had taken a position which was somewhat different from the one taken by him today—

Mr. Pickersgill: Just like the north pole and the south pole.

Mr. McIlraith: Yes; the two positions taken are as far apart as the north pole and the south pole. But in any event, I want to be very forgiving to the minister and tell him that I appreciate the fact that he has moved to the correct pole this time and has taken the correct position now in committee of the whole in bringing forward, or having one of his supporters bring forward, the amendment which is now before us. But before doing that I would ask him whether he consulted the commission before bringing this amendment forward? He had grave doubts, as indicated by the evidence, as to the propriety of consulting him. Perhaps he should qualify that matter, because I am quite sure he would not have consulted an independent body, but I do not think any possibility of a reflection on his conduct should be left on the record, and I would ask him whether he consulted the commission since giving the evidence in committee more than a week ago and before bringing in the amendment? Perhaps the minister would answer the question.

Mr. Fulton: I was just looking for the reference to the further occasion on which the matter was discussed in the committee, when I again indicated, as I think the hon. member will agree, if he reads carefully, or considers carefully what he has just read that I indicated then, that I did not have a closed mind on this subject. He will remember that when the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate moved his amendment in committee I indicated that, in view of the fact that hon. members generally were uniformly concerned about this matter I felt, under those circumstances, that I should be prepared to give the matter further consideration and I undertook then to give it further consideration between the time the bill might be reported from the banking and commerce committee and the time it might come up here. This passage is found starting

[Mr. McIlraith.]

at page 750 of the banking and commerce committee minutes of proceedings and evidence. I pointed out at that time, and I am now reading from page 750:

And I am pleased to note that the effect of this amendment is to indicate that Mr. Pickersgill, in moving it, admits there can be something done to improve the position of Canadian industry without weakening the effects of the combines legislation. That is the first and most important thing that appears from this amendment. And I am delighted to have this indication of agreement by the official opposition with the stand of the government, that we can indeed make certain changes which will improve and benefit the position of industry, and thus of the economy generally, without weakening the terms and objectives of the combines legislation. That is one of the main objectives of the present amendments. I am delighted to have this endorsement of those objectives.

At this point, Mr. Chairman, I might perhaps interpolate that I am delighted to have the agreement of the official opposition today, as indicated by their readiness to accept this amendment, that once again they have confirmed that the combines legislation can be improved by making it clear that certain activities can be indulged in by industry without detriment to the economy and indeed to the benefit of the economy of Canada, and without weakening the combines legislation. The fact that our legislative scheme has been sound throughout is substantiated by the fact that hon. members opposite are prepared to accept this amendment to amend section 32, to which earlier they were apparently so much opposed.

Mr. McIlraith: No, not opposed.

Mr. Fulton: Then I went on to discuss the effect of the amendment as proposed at that time by the hon. member for Bonavista-Twillingate and to indicate that I was not prepared at that moment to accept the amendment because I felt it opened the door too wide. I am now reading from page 751. I said:

For the reasons I have given, I do not think this amendment, as presently drafted, meets the criteria which this committee, or any government concerned with the welfare of Canadian consumers, could adopt.

My suggestion is that the amendment be rejected, but that the principle be re-examined to see whether a proposal consistent with the interests of Canadian industry in the export field, and the overriding interest of consumers domestically, can be devised. And, if it can, the government would be happy to suggest such an amendment in the house.

Therefore, you will observe, Mr. Chairman, by reference to the latest discussion on this point in the banking and commerce committee, that it is established that the minister's position there was absolutely consistent with the position that he outlined to the committee this afternoon.