

*Ocean Shipping Rates*

word "combine" is a little harsh; for my part I think it is. But if, after hearing all these reports about the supposed combine, it seems to me it is in the interests not only of the people of this country but also of the shipping companies themselves to lay their cards on the table, to have a full and free discussion as to whether there has been a fixing of rates—a combine—or not, or whether excessive rates were fixed; so that the people of the country may know whether the steamship companies have or have not overcharged them.

Mr. BRISTOL: Will the hon. member permit a question.

Mr. DUFF: Yes.

Mr. BRISTOL: Is it correct to say that the Canadian Government Merchant Marine have been members of this combine for the last three or four years; and if so has the government obtained from the people who are running the Canadian Government Merchant Marine a full and accurate statement of what has happened in the last three years, when as I understand it they were members of the alleged combine?

Mr. DUFF: A few moments ago I said they were members of this combine, and in 1921 I called the attention of the then government to the fact; and no action was taken. I might further say that I called the attention of this government to the fact, and action I believe has only been taken lately.

Mr. BRISTOL: The question is, what information have they got from former governments concerning our own merchant marine?

Mr. DUFF: I am sorry I cannot answer that question. As a private member I would not know. All that I do know is that the Canadian Government Merchant Marine were in this conference and sat in during the years 1920 and 1921. In 1920 the matter was brought to the attention of the late government, and the merchant marine have been sitting in on this conference ever since. That is absolutely wrong, in my opinion.

Mr. BRISTOL: Therefore they should be able to give accurate information as to whether there is a combine or not, and if there is a combine they could tell us the character of it. We pay the merchant marine money for their services, and we should be able to get information from them.

Mr. DUFF: When the committee meets, some member of the Canadian Government Merchant Marine should be among the first witnesses called.

[Mr. Duff.]

Mr. CARROLL: Do I understand the hon. member to say that they have not withdrawn and that they are still members of the conference?

Mr. DUFF: I understood the Minister of Railways (Mr. Graham) to say that they had withdrawn, but I should like to call the attention of the Minister of Railways to the fact that they have not withdrawn, because they are still members of a conference on their lines running from the Maritime provinces to the British West Indies, and they are exacting rates on freight the same as the Royal Mail Packet are exacting. There is a conference or an understanding between the Royal Mail Packet Company and Canadian Government Merchant Marine with regard to freight rates on goods between the Maritime provinces ports and the West Indies.

Mr. BOYS: Can the hon. member inform the House as to the date when the Canadian Government Merchant Marine withdrew from the conference?

Mr. DUFF: I am sorry I cannot give any information as to that. It is impossible for me as a private member to give the information.

Mr. BOYS: I suppose there can be no doubt they were members of the conference on 31st December last, on which date the report was signed.

Mr. DUFF: I am sorry but I cannot answer that question. The Minister of Railways stated that they had withdrawn, but I personally think that whether they withdrew in December or earlier, it was too late. They should have withdrawn long ago, they should never have been in the conference. My information, however, is that they are still in the conference with regard to fixing rates between the Maritime provinces and the British West Indies, I say it is wrong and the quicker they get out the better.

Mr. CARROLL: That is not this conference

Mr. DUFF: No, but it is a matter of making rates and that is what we are discussing when we are considering this resolution, and I still think the ships of the Canadian Government Merchant Marine should be out of it. I said before that in discussing this question we should look at it broadly. I remember, and no doubt other members here who are as old as I am will remember, that the steamship companies operating on the north Atlantic are a different class of vessel entirely from the vessels operating some years ago, and for that reason those who have invested