

*Combines Investigation Act*

I was very interested in it because it seemed to me that he indicated a course which I think might wisely be followed. He said:

Mr. Chairman, I think I could say, on behalf of president Bengough, that we listened with a great deal of interest to your debate this morning because to some extent it indicated the same difficulties in the minds of the members of the committee that we have, and that is whether or not we should be in favour of the interim report as to whether or not resale price maintenance is a bad thing or a good thing, and in saying that to you I think we should lay our cards on the table. We are speaking for the largest organized group of consumers in this country. There are at least 500,000 paid member of our organization and they have in many cases wives, families, relatives and so on, and they represent a very large proportion of the consuming public. It is important, in our point of view, that we should try to know, before we make up our minds, whether the practice of resale price maintenance grows up as a normal human protection in an economy, or whether it grows up as a predatory practice. In the case of working people, wage earners and their representatives, the combining of men in a trade union grows up from necessity; it grows up as a human practice to protect yourselves, not to hurt anybody, not as a predatory thing but as a protection to the people involved.

That seems to be a very sensible approach to the subject. They do not prejudge it. They want to know about it. They did not want to know the views of somebody else, they wanted to make up their own minds with the facts before them. They did not want just the facts provided by those who were against or those who were for, they wanted all the facts from the most responsible sources. I continue:

Now, we are not employers and we are not the representatives of employers, so we do not know if employers have the same problems or not.

You will observe that they are open-minded; they are ready to believe that they may have.

We know what our problems are like. We know we have to chase a continually rising price level with wages, and we have never yet found a way in which we can do it successfully.

Then I come to the next paragraph:

This is the point we tried to make in the brief. We are very sure in our own minds that over the years gradually trade unions were recognized in law as legitimate associations of people capable of making a bargain under law with their employers. If it is necessary that some sort of similar bargains should be made by the employers for the maintenance of their business and their interests, it also should be done under the law. In other words, we favour whatever price fixing has to be done, whether it be done by trade unions and their employers, by lawyers or doctors or any other association of people, and that it be done under the law. We think if you set up a law of that sort in a positive sense, with a consumers' price board where these arrangements can be considered and approved in whatever form they may necessarily take, that we would be moving in a direction which would uphold the principle of free economy.

He says that, but you will observe that he keeps an open mind and wants to know

[Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood).]

the facts. Then he is examined by the minister, and I should like to read the following:

By Hon. Mr. Garson:

Q. Supposing a number of members of your union were working for a certain manufacturing plant, would you like the idea that the manufacturer should have the sole right to fix wages by himself?

A. Definitely not.

Q. At the present time he has the sole right to fix your prices, his own mark-up of them and the retailer's mark-up on them and all the rest. Do you like that?

A. Has he got that, Mr. Garson?

Q. Did you not know that?

A. What bludgeon does he use on the retailer to force him into that?

Q. Under resale price maintenance he does fix your price. I put this question to you, are you not as anxious to get out from under the manufacturers' power to fix the prices you have to pay with your wages as you are to have some say in the fixing of your own wages?

Mr. Bengough then interrupts and says:

It applies in some instances but there are, shall I say, many variations of that.

I want to digress for a moment because the minister undertook there to make a categorical statement which I think is not warranted. He speaks of the manufacturer as having the sole right to fix prices. The hon. member for York West (Mr. Adamson) had some comments to make on that this afternoon which were absolutely to the point. The idea that the manufacturer sits in an ivory tower and fixes the prices that everyone is going to pay is just a shibboleth. It is something I am sure the Minister of Justice (Mr. Garson) knows does not exist, and he should not say it exists. What manufacturers have to do day by day and month by month is to use their best wits and efforts to find out what prices can be paid by the consumers and, as I said a moment ago, the idea that the manufacturer sits in an ivory tower and fixes prices exists only in theory. I am glad to know and to be able to quote the fact that Mr. Bengough stepped on that and qualified it. Then the hon. member for Eglinton (Mr. Fleming) questioned Mr. Bengough, or I should say Mr. Wismer. Apparently sometimes Mr. Bengough steps in when questions are asked of Mr. Wismer. The hon. member for Eglinton (Mr. Fleming) asked the following:

Q. May I ask Mr. Wismer if he feels that this so-called practice of price maintenance is a detriment to or perhaps in harmony with public interest?

A. I think we can say this, in so far as the deal is made privately and enforced privately we would have to say no, but where it is a general practice I think we would have to have a lot more information.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I suggest that here is a sensible man who is not ready to make a lot of positive statements without information, which is what we are being asked to do in this legislation.