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## Investigate the Cotton Combine

Government Regulation of Textile Manufacturers Seems to Be Badly Needed

EDITOR Farm and Dairy: I wish to draw your attention to a condition in connection with the cost of living, which I believe should have had as prompt and energetic action on the part of the government as has been given to the wheat question. As you will remember, when wheat went to \$3.62 through the action of the wheat gamblers on the Winnipeg exchange, but prompt action was taken by the government to prevent such an abnormal price being maintained.

In passing, I might mention that when wheat was at this high point, the country agents of the large wheat interests were forbidden to buy wheat from the farmers at that price or anything near that price. Evidently the reason wheat was run up to the \$3.62 price was to get four made from \$3.00 wheat sold on a basis of the \$3.62 price. The government acted wisely in placing a legal price on wheat, and more wisely still in following the wheat product until it is on the table of the consumer, by setting a price for flour and bread.

The object of this letter is to place before you the position of the cotton textile market which is becoming most alarming, when it is remembered that the people are more and more dependent upon cotton fabric for clothing since only a fraction of the wool formerly used by manufacturers is now allowed them by the government. In order to get a correct understanding of the situation I wish to point out that leather products in foot wear have only been advanced by the manufacturers, approximately 50 per cent over pre-war prices; while cotton products have been advanced by the cotton manufacturers in some cases 300 per cent and over.

### Explanations that Don't Explain.

When a sales agent of the cotton organization was recently asked for an explanation of an advance from six or seven cents per yard pre-war price to the present price of 18 cents for certain cotton fabric, he gave as the reason "price of raw material" and "labor scarcity." These conditions both apply to the leather footwear industry with equal force, as it cannot be reasonably assumed that the voluntary or draft system got more workers from the cotton than from the boot industry. In connection with the raw material, the conditions apply with even greater force, as there is a surplus of raw material (approximately 500 million pounds over from 1917 stock and a much larger surplus is in sight for 1918) while the hide and leather market shows very little surplus; in some lines there is no surplus whatever. The question is therefore a pertinent and pressing one; that if neither of the solutions offered by the Cotton Organization for the unreasonable price of cotton fabrics is a correct one, what is the real reason?

The solution offered by some on-lookers is that while footwear for Canadians is manufactured by something like fifty independent manufacturers, the cotton fabric of Canada is manufactured by practically one huge organization. In the footwear industry supply and demand sets the price, and in the cotton industry the cotton trust evidently sets the price.

### Why No Complaints.

Why has no one complained of these unfair prices? Who would complain? Would the wholesaler? No, for he does not pay the price, he only collects it, and as he gets 17 per cent from the Cotton Trust for collection fees, why should he object, and if he did object and expose the Trust, he would likely get no more of his product.

To illustrate: The pre-war price for a certain make of Canadian print was eight-and-a-half cents and the whole-  
saler's commission was 2.55 cents per

yard. The Trust raised the price to 15 cents or double the pre-war price, and the consumer was startled, and complained most bitterly, but there was no help, as the English prints were largely shut out of Canada by restrictive duties from England and the protection tariff.

The government was too busy prosecuting the war to pay any attention, and the Trust kept it and took advantage of the situation.

Wholesalers are getting 2.55 cents per yard commission instead of 1.35 cents as formerly, and they did not back up the agitation of consumers for regulation of price.

As soon as the public got accustomed to this ridiculous price, the Trust announced another advance to 19 cents, with the recurrence of inquiries and bitter complaints from the housewife trying to clothe her children. Some weeks passed and with no apparent reason more than a greater scarcity of English prints, an advance was again announced, this time to 25 cents, and the assurance was given the public that it should not get as this print being sold for 75 cents inside of a year.

What has occurred in this particular line of print is practically the history of every other cotton textile in Canada. The fact that the same injurious prices are being asked, and perhaps even greater prices on the United States side, does not answer the question.

### Energetic Action Needed.

This memorandum does not presume to discuss the whole situation, but is an endeavor to point out the ruthlessness with which some corporations exploit the public, and to suggest that energetic action be taken at once by the government to relieve the situation and place the Trust where the large milling corporations and meat packers are placed.

There appears no real reason why the cotton and woolen textile manufacturers should not be regulated as to price, when the miller and the baker have been regulated so satisfactorily. Had the government handled all necessities in food, clothing and fuel as it handled wheat, the country would not now be in such a turmoil with strikes, but through the continual advance of food and clothing there is nothing for the worker to do but strike, if he wishes to keep his family from being starved and frozen.

It is interesting to notice in connection with these abnormal prices on cotton products, the parallel abnormal dividends paid the shareholders of this organization and the advance in the price of its shares.

### Price Regulation.

Does some one say when price regulation is suggested, "It can't be done"? This was said also when wheat regulation was suggested and when description was suggested. For many months the government took that position on both these questions, but when the common people became thoroughly aroused and said "It must be done," then the government found that it could be done.

This can be done as well, and the quicker it is done the better for both the government and the public, as the strikes are going to continue with ever increasing violence until a living supply in food, clothing and fuel is assured the workers of Canada upon a basis of the wage they are receiving.

Do not take this information as authoritative, but just a suggestion as to what a thorough investigation might reveal.

At the time of writing, I have just heard the Trust proposes a price of 32 cents for the print which was formerly sold at above the pre-war price of eight-and-a-half cents.—"A Sufferer."