

The hon. member for Lunenburg (Mr. Duff) urged as the chief point in his address that the government should be commended for taking some steps with respect to the alleged combine; but he adds the qualification, that they should first, through a special committee, find out if such a combine exists; and, if so, the way in which it adversely affects the interests of Canada; and thereupon the special committee should recommend to this House ways and means of meeting the situation in the interests of the people generally. It seems to me that the government has got the cart before the horse. Having received this report from Mr. Preston, they at once proceeded to conclude a contract with Sir William Petersen.

As to the report, I think hon. members looking at it dispassionately will declare it to be full of political prejudice and intended for party propaganda. It contains statements of fact, but interwoven with these statements are subtle implications reflecting upon what he deems to be the failure of preceding governments to take obvious steps to remedy the condition of affairs which he assumes to be long standing. Here is a paragraph which I find on page 7 of the Preston report:

Following the defeat of the Laurier government, however, Mr. Larkin was replaced by Sir George E. Foster, the latter being nominated by the new Prime Minister, Sir Robert Borden. It was expected that the report would be produced by this Imperial commission within two or three years, but five years elapsed before it was available.

Now the implication, of course, which is here is that the Conservatives, having assumed office and being in league with the big interests, allowed this matter to stand in order that it should be rendered fruitless; and reading the report from one end to the other I say it is a fair statement to make that there are political insinuations and propaganda for elections sticking out of it in every line; it is not a report founded on the real merits of this question. If the government had been sincere in trying to arrive at the real unadulterated truth and facts of this question so far as the north Atlantic conference is concerned, they would have done as the hon. member for Lunenburg (Mr. Duff) suggested they should have done—they would have had either a commission or some semi-judicial body sitting in an unprejudiced manner to hear the merits and demerits of all sides of the case; they would have had witnesses from the north Atlantic conference come there, representatives of the steamship companies and of public bodies such as boards of trade and railway corporations—in fact everybody interested in this matter—they would have submitted

[Mr. Ladner.]

the facts and the evidence to this body or commission and then this parliamentary committee, as is now suggested, would make a report to the House of the facts with their recommendations.

Mr. ARTHURS: Is the hon. gentleman aware whether the government made a contract with Sir William Petersen before or after the Preston report?

Mr. LADNER: I think the facts disclosed show very clearly that the contract with Sir William Petersen was made about the time of the Preston report or before it. At any rate the report was based largely upon the information which, perhaps, the government had received in an unofficial manner from Mr. Preston, and from other sources in a general way. But my point is this: That the parties who are really interested, and who have been carrying on the transportation business on the Atlantic ocean for many years, and who would be adversely affected by the proposed legislation, have not, according to their own declaration, been allowed to submit the facts as they see them, or to suggest what they would propose to do as a solution of the problem; and in my humble opinion the government in levelling this popgun of a combine breaker is doing so largely for political purposes prior to an election; it is not pursuing a wise course and it is not sincere.

Mr. LOW: The "popgun" appears to be creating quite a stir.

Mr. LADNER: No, what is causing the stir is the amount of money that will be required to shoot the popgun off. Mr. Preston in his report states that his investigation extended months beyond his expectations, and yet he did not, according to their own statements, go and see the very people, who constitute the combine or north Atlantic conference.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this question seriously and vitally affects western Canada, and particularly the port of Vancouver. That is one of the reasons why I am addressing the House in respect to it. The exports from British Columbia for the year ending March 31, 1922, amounted to \$71,000,000, and for the fiscal year 1923, to \$97,000,000; and in 1924 they jumped to \$140,000,000, an increase of \$43,000,000. There are over forty-five different steamship lines operating out of Vancouver, and most of these are running between that port and the United Kingdom and the continent. Under this proposed agreement the country is not only risking \$13,000,000—not risking it but giving it away—but the commercial and transportation interests of Canada, and the people