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SPEECH OF  
HON. ROBERT L. OWEN

OF OKLAHOMA

IN THE

SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JUNE 9, 1910

OPPOSING THE PROSECUTION UNDER  
THE ANTITRUST LAWS OF LABORING  
MEN WHO ORGANIZE TO BETTER THE  
CONDITIONS OF LABOR



WASHINGTON

1910

50527-9304

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The Senate being in Committee of the Whole and having under consideration the bill (H. R. 25552) making appropriations for sundry civil expenses of the Government for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1911, and for other purposes—

Mr. OWEN said:

Mr. PRESIDENT: I desire to express my regret that the committee should have struck out the proviso of the House bill which provided that the appropriation of \$200,000 should not be used in prosecuting labor organizations under the antitrust laws. The House proviso reads:

That no part of this money shall be spent in the prosecution of any organization or individual for entering into any combination or agreement having in view the increasing of wages, shortening of hours or bettering the condition of labor or for any act done in furtherance thereof not in itself unlawful.

That does seem to me to be the description of a most innocent form of organization, and surely such organizations or their legitimate objects could not be within the purpose of the statute of the United States to forbid the formation of great trust organizations to monopolize trade in this country. The antitrust law is intended to prevent great combinations of capital from depriving men of their just rights.

It is true that the labor organizations which have been built up in this country have in some cases been improvident in some of their actions; but they have been in a large measure excited to such efforts in order to protect themselves and obtain a sufficient amount of the proceeds of their own labor to provide the needs of their families. These are organizations of poor men, men who work by the day, who earn their daily bread with their hands. The purpose of the antitrust law was not to suppress organizations of that kind.

I can not help thinking of the American Tobacco Company and the effect upon the people down in the tobacco-raising country. The tobacco trust, having by monopoly become the sole buyer of tobacco, fixes the price below the cost of produc-

tion, and has driven the poor farmers who raise tobacco to desperation, and even to criminal acts, in their blind efforts to make a living. The ordinary laws which operate to suppress criminal acts are in full operation and will punish the poor oppressed farmers. If they burn a barn they are guilty of arson. If they commit a crime through their Night Riders' organization they violate the ordinary criminal laws, and there is abundant punishment for the criminal act.

But the antitrust laws were not intended to suppress labor, but are necessary and were intended to protect the laborer and the consumer from a conspiracy to defraud them. They were intended to prevent labor and the consumers from being oppressed.

This proviso passed by the House of Representatives is certainly a most reasonable interpretation of what the law ought to be and a direction to the Executive not to use the appropriation to prosecute labor organizations for combining to increase wages, and so forth. If they commit any act that is unlawful, there is abundant means of punishment; but to prevent the laboring men of the country from organizing for the protection of themselves and their families in earning a reasonable livelihood, to combine to increase wages, to shorten hours of labor, to better their condition; and to break up those organizations by treating them in the same way as the law treats a great conspiracy of organized capital against which the antitrust laws were directed, I think is unfair and unjust.

I do hope that the committee will not insist upon striking out these words inserted by the House. I think they ought to be allowed to remain, and I hope they will remain.

The huge organizations of capital in restraint of trade, raising prices on the necessities of life and imposing on the people for the mere sake of ambition, greed, or cold and cruel avarice, needs restraint both on moral, ethical, and legal grounds.

Organization of laboring men to protect women and children from starvation, from exposure, sickness, and death, are justified on every standpoint and should be encouraged.

The antitrust laws were not intended to be used against labor so protecting itself; and if they were, you now have an opportunity the Republican party should gladly seize, to correct and amend such laws in the interest of labor if the Republicans really and truly are the friends of labor.

I fear, Mr. President, that organized capital, which contributes money to keep the Republican party in power, will

control the vote of the Senate against the poor laboring organizations. I pray you not to vote against labor.

\* \* \* \* \*  
The result was announced—yeas 34, nays 16, as follows:

## YEAS—34.

Borah	Carter	Flint	Oliver
Bourne	Clapp	Frye	Perkins
Brandegee	Clark, Wyo.	Gallinger	Smoot
Bristow	Crane	Gamble	Stephenson
Brown	Crawford	Hale	Stone
Bulkeley	Cullom	Heyburn	Warren
Burnham	Dick	Kean	Wetmore
Burrows	Dixon	McEnergy	
Burton	du Pont	Nelson	

## NAYS—16.

Bacon	Fletcher	Martin	Percy
Burkett	Frazier	Newlands	Simmons
Chamberlain	Gore	Owen	Smith, S. C.
Dolliver	Jones	Page	Warner

## NOT VOTING—42.

Aldrich	Daniel	Lorimer	Root
Bailey	Davis	McCumber	Scott
Bankhead	Depew	Money	Shively
Beveridge	Dillingham	Nixon	Smith, Md.
Bradley	Elkins	Overman	Smith, Mich.
Briggs,	Foster	Paynter	Sutherland
Clarke, Ark.	Guggenheim	Penrose	Taliaferro
Clay	Hughes	Piles	Taylor
Culbertson	Johnston	Purcell	Tillman
Cummins	La Follette	Rayner	
Curtis	Lodge	Richardson	

So the amendment was agreed to.

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