

Combines Investigation Act

and that it should be strengthened and clarified. We believe that it should be strengthened from the point of view of effective prosecution, and we believe that every provision in the act must be adhered to by the government of the day and the members of that government—particularly the minister charged with ultimate responsibility under the act.

We believe also that the act should provide a mechanism which will prevent abuses, but at the same time not interfere with those associations which are not injurious to the public interest. That was the purpose intended to be included in the act under the provision that in order to constitute an offence under the act there must be a combine contrary to the public interest. We believe a much more effective way of handling this can be provided. We believe, in other words, that these amendments are inadequate. If the motion to refer the subject matter of the bill to a committee had been adopted—and I am not debating the decision in that respect—there would have been an opportunity to examine fully that point, and to make recommendations. At this stage, in the debate on the bill, it is impossible to provide for adequate amendments which would really make the act effective.

It may well be that some who are discussing the combines act may have different views as to its purposes. I really doubt if there are the differences of views which have been suggested. I believe it is immensely important that combines which are contrary to the public interest should be dealt with effectively. I believe that legislation—and effective legislation—of this kind is essential to the very type of the free competitive system in which I believe.

I am convinced that our idea as to the advantages of free competition is premised on the fact that there will not be a denial of competition by agreements between companies which have the effect of preventing improvement in quality, improvement in usefulness, and reduction in prices by competition. Failure to have an act of this kind which is really effective, and administered effectively by the government in office, is in itself an invitation to that very rigid type of economy with which I disagree, and with which I am sure most members in the house disagree.

Sometimes these discussions are related to a misunderstanding of definitions. I was interested this morning to hear a reference to competition, and the necessity for competition to keep prices down. That is what we believe in. When we talk about a free

economy and free enterprise, we are asserting our belief that the individual man or woman in his or her home in this country benefits most from a system which by competition itself will improve quality and lower prices.

That has been the advantage of this system; and it is because of that system that we have on this continent today the highest standard to be found anywhere in the world. It is because we want to continue that system, to continue that competition and to continue the improvement of the living conditions which come from lowered prices, improved quality and improved usefulness, that we so strongly insist upon an effective act to prevent combines which would destroy competition and which are contrary to the interests of the people of Canada. That is why we are devoting so much attention to what has happened in this particular case and expressing such strong opinions about it.

The Minister of Justice was asked if he would give the assurance that under no circumstances in the future would there be a similar breach of the law—again with that detachment which it is our duty as members of this high court of parliament to observe. The minister's explanation yesterday in that respect was the most cynical statement I have heard since I came into the house early this year, and I regret that there have been a number of them. The minister did not say to the hon. member who asked him the question: I recognize the enormity of a breach by the Minister of Justice of the laws of parliament which every citizen is compelled to observe, and it will not recur. He did not say that. He said in effect—I do not pretend to give the exact words, but I trust he will not question my interpretation: The hon. member who has raised the question places a very low estimate on my intelligence if he thinks that I would let myself in for this much trouble again. That is what he said. I am sure the minister will not suggest that I have misinterpreted his reply. In other words, what he says is this: If we keep it dark, we will really keep it dark this time and will not make this mistake once more.

Mr. Garson: Mr. Chairman, on a question of privilege, I think I would be prepared to leave it to hon. members of this house to decide whether or not the interpretation the hon. member has placed upon my language is an unjust one. Lest there be any misunderstanding about the matter, may I say that in response to the question of the hon. member for Lake Centre, as has been reported, I said that he would be placing a rather low estimate upon my intelligence if he thought that under circumstances over which I had

[Mr. Drew.]