

tent to expedite passage of this bill if I could find some justification for the rush. For that reason I searched today for justification. One might like to justify urgency on the ground that this government understands or sympathizes with the consumer or the small businessman, but I can find no justification in that regard.

This government, in my opinion, has not only had a history of but a propensity for callous disregard for the consumer. On the one hand it crawls and covers under the protection of the Food Prices Review Board; on the other it struts and prances like a proud caupon when discussing its attempts to put ceilings on the price of such things as milk and bread at the consumer level, while conveniently and simultaneously ignoring the input costs and transportation problems of the farmer-producer of these items.

● (2120)

With regard to small business, I suggest that the record of the government is dismal. It consists mainly of pious utterances in a succession of throne speeches, followed by a remarkable lack of activity between the speeches. The government has increased remarkably the problems of the small businessman. The small businessman in my riding, and in every riding in this country, deals with more and more government inspectors, he has more and more government forms to fill out, more and more government statistics to compute, and more and more reports to complete.

This government, in summary, has said to small business—I think this is the crux of it all—“If you want to expand, borrow money at prohibitive rates of interest.” The government’s action and concern for the consumer and small businessman gives me no justification for this rush on the part of the minister. I looked at the record of the minister and that of his predecessors in respect of competition legislation. Of course, I had to look for further back than 1971 and the competition act, the infamous Bill C-256 which was conceived in ignorance, drafted without understanding and which could have been implemented in chaos.

Fortunately for both consumer and businessman alike, it died the death it so richly deserved. Therefore, the government’s track record in this field of legislation provides remarkable lack of justification for proceeding so hastily. Then I looked at the minister’s speech—I believe it is at page 482 of *Hansard*—where he refers to the problems of foreign judgments, laws and directives and says:

I think that recent events have demonstrated the importance of this proposal and have provided a strong argument for the House to make a favourable decision on this bill at the earliest possible date.

No doubt the minister was referring to the MLW-Worthington Limited case. Then at page 483 the minister says:

At the same time, by asking the House to deal now with Bill C-7 I am taking action on behalf of the government to enable parliament to take decisions earlier than would otherwise be the case in some important areas particularly relevant to present public concerns linked with current inflationary pressures.

Speaking for myself, I recognize these two problems as being extremely urgent. I sympathize with the problems, of the minister, and indeed with the government. However, I am more in sympathy with the problems of the consumer and the businessman. With respect, I submit the

Competition Bill

minister knows very well there are other more efficient and expeditious means of dealing with these problems. I am sure the minister has been well aware of them for some time.

I am sure these matters will be discussed in this debate. Indeed, this question was mentioned by the hon. member for Sarnia-Lambton earlier today and by the hon. member for Trinity (Mr. Hellyer). Yesterday, my colleague the hon. member for St. Paul’s (Mr. Atkey) suggested a minimum of four to six weeks before commencement of the committee hearings. I hasten to say that I agree completely with that request. In doing so, may I make an attempt to justify our position. I and every member of this House received an information kit from the minister and the department. It contained Bill C-227, the press release and a number of papers called background documents. I contacted the minister’s office and he was good enough to send me 50 more of these kits which I distributed to 50 businessmen in my riding.

I do not pretend to be a spokesman for big business, because in my riding we do not have big business. I suppose the biggest business in my riding would employ about 250 people: the average would be between 100 and 125 people. These businesses are at all levels, retail, wholesale, manufacturing and service. I submitted this material along with what I call the blue book, entitled “Proposals for a new competition policy for Canada, 1973”. Again I thank the minister for providing me with sufficient copies. I sent these out for the purpose of obtaining a reaction, and solicited inquiries.

I did not receive any wild-eyed, outraged condemnation. I did receive, in profusion, questions such as, “What does this mean? Does this mean strict liability? What are the procedural rules of the commission?” And so on. In summary, I received answers indicating a good deal of confusion in respect of the bill. Although some of the provisions are short, they involve extremely complex matters. Now that some 3½ or four months have passed since I distributed the material—as I am sure many other members have—the tremendous business and economic complexities of the bill at this point have been only partially digested.

These representatives of the small business community want to play their part, the part they deserve to play, in informing us of their opinion regarding this legislation. I am sure various consumer groups are adopting the same position. Again, they have an obligation, as have their business counterparts, to advise us and give us their opinion. I, for one—and I do not believe I am alone—want the best possible input when this matter is discussed in committee. My friends to the left, the NDP, will probably disagree. The hon. member for Toronto-Lakeshore (Mr. Grier) yesterday, as recorded at page 488 of the official record, said:

From my point of view, this legislation has appeared none too soon. I hope the bill will proceed to committee without lengthy debate and, in view of the fact that much discussion has already taken place on the general principles and philosophy of competition policy, that we can avoid the bill’s being bogged down in committee as it is lobbied by one group or another over a lengthy period of time.

I say to my hon. friend, the hon. member for Toronto-Lakeshore, that there is a lot more to this bill than what he calls general principle and philosophy of competition