

Combines Investigation Act

in most of our cities and towns occupies a commanding position. Certainly in any town in which I have lived the retail merchant is a solid citizen. He has land and owns property in the business section of the town. He owns residential property, and is interested in the future of the community in which he lives. He takes a keen interest in the development of that community, and frequently is to be found on municipal councils and school boards.

If there is some advantage to be gained by the retail merchant through resale price maintenance, an advantage that has cost the consumer something extra—and this has not yet been proved to my satisfaction—but if that should be so, is it not a just and reasonable price to pay for a very effective and useful community service?

Those are some of the thoughts that have passed through my mind with regard to the retail merchant. I would not like to see his position disturbed. In the constituency I have the honour to represent there exists one of the greatest shopping centres in Canada. I refer to the celebrated Portage avenue, which extends from Main street, westward to the city limits for a very considerable distance, and for most of that distance has on either side of it business establishments.

We have the large departmental stores, chain stores and all manner of smaller retail stores. Within that area there is a difference of opinion with regard to this particular matter. My understanding, from the evidence given to the committee and statements made here in the house, is that the large retail stores are not particularly concerned about the legislation and are not opposing it, whereas the smaller retail merchant is offering vigorous opposition. There is a conflict of interest there.

I have been hearing from my constituents on this matter. I have had more than thirty communications on the mimeographed form to which attention has been drawn earlier this session, and I have had between fifteen and twenty telegrams from businessmen who are seriously concerned with this problem. And the consumers, certainly with no more information than I had when I first came to this session, as well as information that emerged from the investigation by the committee of the house, and of course interested in a reduction in the cost of living, and being influenced by statements in the speech from the throne and other remarks earlier in the session, have naturally sent communications to me concerning this matter. They have hoped that this would be one way in which the cost of living would be reduced.

Retail merchants, with a greater knowledge of the facts, have sent telegrams and letters to me suggesting that it would not be a good thing, and that it should be opposed.

Again I suggest to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Garson) that there is a distinct conflict of opinion in the constituency I represent, and that that should be taken into account.

I shall conclude with just these few remarks. My consideration of the problem indicates that a very small segment of the problem of the retail merchant is concerned. The figure of 15 per cent has been suggested as one which might be acceptable. I have come to the conclusion that no effect will be felt by way of a reduction in the cost of living. I have reached the conclusion that the retail merchants would desire some protection against the loss-leader practice, if this legislation goes through. I have reached the further conclusion that the small retail merchant is in danger.

Consequently I suggest that in view of this divided opinion in the house and in the committee, and in the community at large, legislation such as this should be postponed for more complete investigation. If it is the determination of the government to pass it there should be more than just a verbal assurance that the small merchant will be protected. Something should be included in the measure to give him that protection.

In any case I think delay would be a sensible procedure, until the full implications of this proposed legislation are considered. So far as I am concerned, I say that three conditions should be satisfied before the legislation is passed:

The first condition I have laid down is this, to establish convincing evidence that resale price maintenance is detrimental to the public interest.

Secondly, produce evidence that the abolition of resale price maintenance will result in a decrease in the cost of living of the consumer.

Third, produce evidence that the abolition of resale price maintenance will not harm the smaller retailer.

Mr. J. A. Charlton (Brant-Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the suggestion made in the house recently by the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggan (Mr. Coldwell) and also the hon. member for Halton (Mr. Cleaver) that no purpose would be served by further debate on this measure, I wish to make one suggestion to hon. members that I believe warrants their consideration as to how far this house should go in approving the measure now before us.