

*Competition Tribunal Act*

related and blended interests will take precedence over the depositors.

• (1520)

I venture to say, although there has not been too much public debate in the business community, that about 90 per cent of the businessmen and women in Canada, if you were to ask them privately in person, are disturbed by the growing concentration of economic and financial power in Canada. I think if you were to put the question personally they would admit that they are disturbed that more and more assets are winding up in fewer and fewer hands.

Some businessmen have been courageous enough to speak out. I refer to a recent article in *Maclean's* magazine by Peter Newman. He interviewed Bernard Ghert of Cadillac-Fairview. Mr. Ghert in response to Mr. Newman's inquiry said:

When one entity is both a creditor and an owner of equity in a company, there is an obvious conflict of interest.

I regret to say that as this escalation in concentration has proceeded with an increasing corporate temperature the Government has turned a blind eye to it, and I do not believe that it is good for the country. I believe the advantage of widely held corporate institutions by thousands of shareholders gives Canadians a proprietary interest in equity terms in the future of our country. I think it gives people a stake, either through pension funds or through individual holdings in the future of Canada. As those opportunities for investment are diminished by this concentration, fewer and fewer Canadians will find a legitimate outlet for investment in their own country through the private enterprise available.

I want to add too that if these companies are privately held in larger and larger units, then the public has less and less ability to scrutinize the affairs of those domains that have a wider and wider purview over average Canadian life.

I believe also, in terms of the phenomenon of power, that too much concentration of economic power lends itself to abuse in terms of attempted use of political power. I would think this House should turn its mind to this issue. I believe the House would also want to review some of the amendments we intend to propose to see whether this vogue, this wave of takeovers, can somehow be controlled.

*[Translation]*

There is another phenomenon, the concentration of economic power in a few large cities in Canada, and I believe, and I submit to the House, that this is to the detriment of other regions in Canada. Such concentration will have repercussions on regional development policies, and management of these large corporations will drift farther and farther away from the small communities of this country.

Less competition has a number of immediate effects. Without competition, the pressure for lower prices diminishes. Without competition, there is no longer the same drive to offer a quality product. Without competition, consumers have a narrower range to choose from. Without competition, the

number of information sources we have is reduced. Without competition, consumer power drops and corporate power increases. And Canadian consumers are the losers.

*[English]*

The more concentration we have, the fewer outlets consumers will have. There used to be hundreds of opportunities in various businesses in various industries in Canada. Now those opportunities, those channels of choice are being narrowed. The number of brands is being reduced. There are reduced options for the consumer. There is a continued squeeze on small companies. There is more and more temptation on behalf of these larger units to indulge in predatory pricing or restraint in trade at the expense of independent Canadian small business.

We recognize, Mr. Speaker, that this issue has to be dealt with in a balanced way. There has been study after study. The economic council has looked at it, as well as the C.D. Howe Research Institute, and you can name the provincial and federal governments that have tried to deal with the issue. There has to be a balance between our ability as Canadians to compete internationally and the protection of our smaller businesses, particularly the Canadian consumer.

I had the honour under Mr. Pearson, when he was Prime Minister of our country, to be the first Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

**Mr. Orlikow:** Why didn't you bring in some legislation?

**Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra):** We brought in a lot of legislation. I want to say this to my friend from Winnipeg, that shortly after we set up the Department, got it moving and got it into operation, we had a change in leadership of the Party and the next Prime Minister elevated me to a different portfolio, otherwise I would have considered my interest in the consumer and the four rights of the consumer at that time. They were the right to choose, the right to be informed, the right to complain and the right to receive an answer. Those were the fundamental rights of the consumer at that time, and I doubt very much whether in this current piece of legislation or under the current philosophy of the Government that those rights are paramount.

What has happened under the *laissez-faire* attitude of this Government when it comes to corporate concentration? We now have an open season for the corporate raider. We have an open season for the asset hunter. We have an open season for those who wish to acquire assets as a short-cut to building a business and to building jobs.

As I said, I am particularly concerned with the impact of the phenomenon on small business. The bulk of jobs in small business give us the bulk of our new employment. Most employees of small business are women. Most of the opportunities for our young people will be found either in entrepreneurial opportunities in small business or by being hired by smaller business.