

Competition Bill

those years. I am proud to say to anyone in Canada that I have been a trade union leader, not just because trade unions have given our people many benefits and more money but because they have given them dignity, which is something we never had before the advent of the trade union movement.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The time allotted for the consideration of private members' business having expired, I do now leave the chair.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

COMBINES INVESTIGATION ACT

AMENDMENTS RESPECTING DEFINITIONS, ADMINISTRATION
AND OFFENCES

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Gray that Bill C-7, to amend the Combines Investigation Act and the Bank Act and to repeal an act to amend an act to amend the Combines Investigation Act and the Criminal Code, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs.

Mr. Max Saltzman (Waterloo-Cambridge): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate the hon. member for Trinity (Mr. Hellyer) for his excellent speech this afternoon; I thought it was an extremely thoughtful contribution. I would also like to congratulate him for having changed the Conservative Party's position on combines. It is a very convenient approach to have the hon. member for St. Paul's (Mr. Atkey) lead off with sort of faint praise and indicate his support, and then have the hon. member for Trinity, with the rest of them following through, condemning the whole combines legislation approach which I think a Conservative government was very instrumental in enlarging.

● (2010)

I agree generally with the analysis of the hon. member for Trinity, although there are some exceptions to my agreement. One of those exceptions is the attitude he took toward condemning big unions as contributors to inflation. When you talk about big unions, you talk about auto workers, steel workers, packing house workers and oil and chemical workers. If he would look at the record, he would find that in those industries price increases have been among the lowest in this country, mainly because their productivity has been rising substantially. To say that those unions have contributed to inflation is contrary to the facts.

[Mr. Neale (Vancouver East).]

There are some difficulties, and I am surprised the hon. member did not point them out and how they arise in creating an inflationary atmosphere. The real problem is not in industries where the big unions exist; it is that other sectors of our economy cannot match the productivity increase in steel, automobiles and chemicals, and therefore as they seek to obtain commensurate benefits the pressure in the service industries contributes substantially to inflation.

In looking at the combines legislation, it seems that the members who have come to the defence of the bill are using the argument of all kinds of small benefits to support the legislation. The small benefits that they trot out, no matter how you total them, are still small benefits. A whole bunch of zeros multiplied by zero still comes out as zero. Frankly, I found it very difficult to understand either the ferocious opposition to the legislation by the business community or the kind of support for the legislation by some academics who have been to my office urging me to support the bill.

So far as business is concerned, it seems to me that if this legislation does anything, it protects business because it really obscures the problems created by business in our society. If anything, it simply puts a price on their misbehaviour. It does not make it impossible for them to misbehave, nor does it allow their misbehaviour; it simply says: If you do this, we will impose a penalty on you and you will pay a price for so doing. That is not a bad deal for business and I find it very difficult to know what they became so excited about.

The one area given to business as a concession, and which I presume reduced their opposition, was the section that now says directors of a corporation will not be held liable for the actions of the corporation. This is ironical in a way, because for years the same people have been arguing that trade union leaders should be held personally liable for the actions of trade unionists. Then at the first opportunity they get, instead of really continuing the argument about holding people responsible and liable, they simply say: We want to be exempted as well. So another of their favourite arguments has gone down the drain.

I do not see how consumers will benefit in any substantial way. Many of the things the bill sets out to correct, such as bait, switch and pyramid selling, do not involve many consumers. How many consumers are really involved in pyramid selling? You must have an enormous streak of stupidity in you to go for one of these pyramid sales clubs. The only people I know who were trapped were people who were persuaded that they would make a lot of money without having to make much effort. Perhaps we should have laws protecting people from their own cupidity. It is probably just as well to have something like that, because occasionally somebody relatively innocent may be trapped in that kind of swindle. This is the kind of swindle that an ordinary person sees through very easily. Most of the people who get caught in it are looking for a fast buck themselves and I sometimes wonder how much sympathy should be extended to them.

The academics, of course, will have another field day. Some of the academics in Canada have made their living from describing the combines legislation, enlarging upon