

Competition Bill

As a matter of fact, there are many other things in the bill that they have not mentioned. I would be the first to admit that perhaps this is not a perfect bill by any means. My hon. friend believes that the only thing that is perfect is the seat in which he is sitting, but let me tell him that there is no such thing as perfection around here. I am not perfect, and with respect I say to my hon. friend that he is not either. Neither is the government. We have not said that. We are doing the best we can, but we want to get this bill to the committee so members of all parties in this House and the people of Canada can examine it. We do not appreciate the eternal frustration we have had to endure as a result of speaker after speaker from the opposition saying the bill is no good and it should be examined for a few more years.

● (1600)

I am sure you understand, Mr. Speaker, that this matter has been before the Canadian parliament and the people for years. If anything is said about this matter at all, perhaps it should be that it should have been passed by this House years ago. Perhaps it should have been passed when our Tory friends were in power. They are great ones to tell us what we should do now, but we should remember that they did not do a darned thing about this matter when they had the opportunity.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Whicher: There are many provisions of this bill that will be of assistance to the Canadian consumer. I have heard members of my own party and members of other parties in the House, as well as the media on television and over the radio, say there has been misleading advertising in Canada. While this bill is not perfect, and I am the first to admit it, at least it does something to protect the consumer when he buys goods in any store.

Part of the bill deals with warranties and guarantees. I agree with the hon. member for York-Simcoe who pointed out that there is nothing wrong, as a whole, with Canadian business but that unfortunately there is a bad apple in every barrel whether it be in the political or business sense. This country has been built by hardworking people through a system of free enterprise. As a result, we have one of the best systems in the world, with the best standard of living. So I do not want to be too critical of business or offer carte blanche criticism but I do suggest that the odd business takes advantage of the consumer, who will be offered some protection under this measure.

So far as warranties and guarantees are concerned, this measure will make absolutely sure that goods cannot be offered until they have been subjected to adequate tests. We have heard talk of pyramid selling. I agree that these things may be of little consequence in the over-all picture, but they are very important to the individual Canadian. We have also heard talk of referral selling. In this regard, someone may buy a washing machine, and if he gives a list of 25 or 100 prospective purchasers of washing machines he gets the machine cheaper, or for nothing, whatever the case might be. That practice will be banned under this bill.

How many times have we read advertisements of cars for sale saying that the price has been cut by \$100, but on going to the agency involved people have found that only

[Mr. Whicher.]

two cars were offered for sale at the reduced price, with the remainder being sold at the original price? That practice will be stopped by this measure, and I am sure my Conservative friends will admit that this will at least offer some protection to individuals who are in the market for a car; they will be sure of the opportunity of buying such a car at the advertised price.

During the last few months we have heard a lot about the practice of double-ticketing, particularly by grocery chains. An article may have sold for 22 cents, but when the housewife goes to purchase it the price has been jacked up to 27 cents, or whatever it might be. From now on, according to the law, when there are two prices on an item, the customer will have the right to purchase the item at the lowest price.

There are many other things covered by this bill, including services. The hon. member for York-Simcoe referred to the fact that there are many lawyers in this House. In my experience in politics I have found this to be necessary because those of us engaged in politics are making and changing laws. However, the fact is that lawyers have shown a tendency to submit to inflationary pressures by charging increased fees for their services. Let me point out that it is certainly not unknown in various areas of Ontario that every lawyer will charge the same fee for the same service. I should like to know whether it is fair that the legal profession should do this. The fact is that lawyers have been able to get away with it, but they will not be able to get away with it in future because services are included in this measure.

Lawyers will no longer be able to get together to create artificial costs for their services. After the passage of this measure, lawyers will not be able to follow this practice, just as glass companies and other companies will not be able to fix prices as many of them have in the past. The fact is that they will be subject to this Canadian law and can be brought into court if they do not live up to it.

It is my opinion that the fines being levied against companies which have been found guilty of collusion in fixing prices contrary to the Combines Investigation Act have been far too low. I hope the fines in respect of such practices in respect of personal services will be substantial because services represent an important part of our economy. I am sure services will be considered within the terms of this measure when it becomes law.

I have no intention of continuing much longer as I think that everything that might be said in respect of this bill has been said not only in this House but outside through the media. I think the bill should be thoroughly examined. Without in any way trying to cut off the debate—I have not the power to do so if I wanted to—I would urge hon. members to send the bill to the committee after a reasonable period of time, say a couple of days, where it can be examined thoroughly.

Before I sit down I should state that I hope members of the official opposition will hold a caucus not only in respect of this bill but all others that come before the House in order that they can decide where they stand, rather than waste the time of parliament and the Canadian people bickering among themselves through not knowing on which side they really stand.