

Small Businesses Loans Act

If the legislation is not applied equally or if the banks are discriminating, then the government has the responsibility to take remedial action. If the Minister of Finance is correct in saying that the Governor of the Bank of Canada shares his view that there is to be a liberalization of restraints in slow growth areas, certainly we are entitled to better treatment than we have been getting.

• (4:00 p.m.)

Mr. Burton: Mr. Speaker, the bill to amend the Small Business Loans Act is a very important piece of legislation requiring the full attention of members of this House. I think that small business across Canada is facing very serious problems and, indeed, in many cases is faced with the problem of whether it will be able to survive over the next period of years. This has come about, Mr. Speaker, in large part because of the increasing concentration of economic power within Canada. Thus, many small businesses find it difficult to compete with large corporations, large monopolies or even conglomerates, not only because of problems of competing in price but also because of problems in commanding adequate amounts of the resources necessary to enable small businesses to take advantage of the technological advances which would enable them to give their customers the type of service and product which is required.

Thus, Mr. Speaker, small business faces very many serious problems. Some of these problems have been discussed in this debate, and I concur with the suggestion that some of the aspects of this legislation and its administration, aspects which have been drawn to the attention of the government, require full consideration if, in fact, small business is to survive.

Reference has already been made, as a result of an amendment which was ruled out of order by Your Honour, to the position of the treasury branches in the province of Alberta. Of course, at this stage I cannot discuss the amendment that was originally moved and subsequently ruled out of order, but I wish to discuss this subject matter within the framework of clause 1 of the bill as it has been reported back by the committee without amendment. The amendment that has been moved with respect to paragraph (a) of section 2 pertains to the definition of "bank" and would include banks within the meaning of the Bank Act. It would also permit credit unions, caisses populaire, co-

operative credit societies, insurance companies, trust companies and loan companies, if designated by the minister, to become lenders under the Small Businesses Loans Act. It seems to me that the principle involved in this amendment is perfectly sound, namely, that those institutions which people may wish to use to take advantage of this legislation to carry on their business affairs should be empowered to make loans under this act. It seems to me that that principle is perfectly sound. It is the principle that is intended in this amendment.

However, it is perfectly obvious that one particular group of businesses, namely the treasury branches of the province of Alberta, have been overlooked or not included in the amendment placed before the House in this clause. I am quite willing to give the government the benefit of the doubt and say that this was an unintentional oversight; but it seems to me that consideration should be given to including this group of institutions within this act. After all, Mr. Speaker, there are many people within the province of Alberta who conduct their financial affairs at the treasury branches of that province. They are the places of business for the carrying on of peoples' financial business in many Alberta communities, and many of the people of Alberta use them. Thus it seems to me that if the principle involved in this section is to be applied generally, the minister should seriously consider taking the necessary steps to ensure that the branches are included within this legislation. Thus, I would urge him to take the necessary steps to ensure that the treasury branches of the province of Alberta which perform a very useful function for the people of the province are included in this legislation.

Mr. John L. Skoberg (Moose Jaw): Mr. Speaker, may I speak briefly on Bill C-9? I support the comments of my colleague, the hon. member for Regina East (Mr. Burton), and urge the government and the minister to include within the legislation the treasury branches of the province of Alberta because they perform very useful work and to exclude them from the provisions of this bill would be, in my opinion, discriminatory. Surely, there can be no objection to including the treasury branches, because they have served a wonderful purpose in the province. I am sure the treasury branches of that province wish to be included in any privileges that are granted to other lending institutions.