

Competition Tribunal Act

will be pursued. It is interesting to note that the number of anti-trust suits taken by the U.S. Department of Justice under the Reagan administration is almost half of those taken under the previous Democratic administration. It is the same law but a different Government, therefore there is a substantial reduction in the number of anti-trust actions which have been taken.

I believe all Hon. Members came to this House with some interest and expectation with respect to the position of the Government not on the legislation *per se*, important as that may be, but on how the Government intends to use those new legislative tools and instruments in order to deal with the major fundamental change taking place today. We received part of our answer today in Question Period. We asked the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Coté) if he intends to apply this law retroactively as his colleague, the Minister of State for Finance (Mrs. McDougall), says she intends to do in the case of financial takeovers. We asked if he would apply the same rules retroactively based upon this legislation to the Gulf Oil Hiram Walker takeover. All we received was an adroit dancing on the head of a pin. There was no answer and no commitment. That was repeated by the Minister's Parliamentary Secretary who, in his period in opposition, ran to the barricades hoisting banners high in defence of the interests of the competitive market-place. All of a sudden he has found a reason to hide behind his desk and behind government baffle-gab such as: "Well, maybe. Who knows. We'll have to see. Its hypothetical". We have all been through that, Mr. Speaker. It is greatly disappointing that the Hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr. Domm), who acquired such a reputation as a Member of the Opposition for his crusading defence of the consumer, now finds himself engaging in what can only be called dissembling.

Mr. Nunziata: Hypocrisy.

Mr. Axworthy: "Dissembling" I think is a more parliamentary word. It is one I prefer because it carries with it an even broader definition of someone who simply has wheels for legs and runs up and down the aisles looking for cover.

What we have here is a clear example of no policy. We have asked questions as to what the Government intends to do about the obvious and clear evasion of market-place standards by the major oil retailers, refiners and wholesalers. Time after time examples have been brought forward where the downstream pricing of oil products has been convoluted, restricted and, in fact, constipated by decisions taken not by the market-place but inside corporate boardrooms. What answers have we received? We have received evasion, obfuscations and dissembling, no policy. What more evidence does the Government require? We gave the example this afternoon of Canada's largest oil supplier clearly dumping off its extra supply in the United States at below market prices in order to cream off its surplus in the Manitoba market so as to keep its prices high. That is a very obvious demand for action to which I hope the Minister will give his attention.

The reactive demands of the Opposition would not be necessary if the Government had a policy, if it recognized that its theology of the market-place, which has been pronounced from on high from every pulpit since that Party arrived in government, applies both ways. It does not just mean giving the oil companies a free ride on the tax system. It also means making sure the benefits flow cleanly through the system and are subject to market discipline and pressures.

It makes one think that this devotion to the market-place is not a devotion at all but simply a camouflage to cover up some really unhealthy practices carried on by its friends in big business. The Parliamentary Secretary can rise in the House with his hand over his heart portraying his Government as the defender of small business, but its actions belie those words.

I applaud in part some of the Conservative back-benchers who, over the weekend, were bold enough to say some action should be taken. However, by Monday morning they found reasons for not being here and for forgetting their commitment. They got themselves all the publicity they needed over the weekend but, once again, where is the action to support words? What we are finding is that this is a Government simply made up of words. It is a Government in which the public relations mimeograph machine is far more important than the effects of action, policies and programs. That is not excusable when we take into account the circumstances we now face. We are not dealing with some trifling matter or some kind of small marginal legislation. We are going to the very heart of the economic structure of this country. We are going to the question of who will be making decisions. It would seem to me that whether one is Conservative, Liberal or socialist, that question must set up a major concern about growing economic concentrations of power. Those who control the avenues of money begin to control the avenues of communication, of advertising and of political payment. Before we know it, it is they who will decide what is in the public interest, not the people who are elected to decide. The first question we must ask is: Are there sufficient powers in this legislation to respond to that concentration? The second question is: Does the Government have the guts and the willingness to put a policy in place to make it work?

● (1550)

As my colleague said this morning, we contend that the legislation has been weakened from the original legislation, Bill C-29, which was presented by the previous Government by the then Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. There have been some very interesting shifts in terms of the language. One now has to prove that there is an intent, a purpose, to frustrate competition. It will have to be shown that there is some type of malicious intent. All that the perpetrator will have to say is: "Gosh, I didn't know it was going to happen that way. I'm as innocent as Huck Finn. I've just been out on the raft, folks. I don't know what's going on. The fact that my acquisition has now given me full control over the energy sector, or the drilling sector, is something I didn't know would happen". Thus everyone will say: "You are obviously not