

importance of competition in the petroleum industry in the forefront of public debate. The minister apparently agrees with the director's assessment. The minister has said that public awareness will have a very strong deterrent effect in the future, and that during the inquiry the activities of those oil companies will be up front. That is the reason why the minister agrees when the director says it must go to the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission.

● (1425)

Will the minister stand in his place and say that is the sole purpose for referring the report to the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission?

An hon. Member: He just gave four reasons.

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, my answer is absolutely no. I have just given the House the answer that has been supplied to me by the director. Yesterday, in answering the Leader of the Opposition, I undertook to talk to the director and ask him the reason why he preferred the option of going to the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission.

My position as Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs is not to agree or disagree with the finding of the director's inquiry, but to concur with the course of action taken by the director. I agree with the director that at this time it is good that he has decided to go before the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: The minister has avoided answering the question. He has not told us why he thinks it is a good reason to go to the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission. He answered why the director did not want to proceed with prosecution. I have quoted the director as to why he wanted to go, and it is highly unlikely. The fact is that this whole access is going to delay relief and changes in the law—because that is all the commission will do—Mr. Stoner said all they can suggest is changes to the legislation. That was the purpose of his hearings.

A Section 47 investigation is currently being conducted into the relationship between Bell Canada and Northern Telecom. The RTPC had four years of hearings, sat for 224 days, travelled the entire breadth of the country—

Madam Speaker: Order. Will the hon. member please proceed with his question?

Mr. Hnatyshyn: I will simply ask him the question. What concerns me is that nothing will happen if Northern Telecom and the Bell Telephone matters are any indication, for an immense period of time. Why and how can the minister have this unconscionable delay before taking any action, if he is waiting for the recommendation of that commission?

Mr. Ouellet: I think that the answer is very simple. This director referred one matter to the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission, that is, the Bell Northern inquiry. Previously,

two other large inquiries were referred to the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission—

An hon. Member: Who has ever heard of them?

Mr. Ouellet:—the bid depositories and also the ophthalmic goods. The time that the commission took to deal with these questions was two years for the bid depository and three years for the ophthalmic goods, and it is expected that within the three and a half years the Bell Northern inquiry will be completed.

In comparison, when the director dealt with the sugar cases, he went to court and it took 11 years to go through the process.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: It took you one minute to get in trouble.

Mr. Ouellet: In assessing the various routes he could follow, the director made his decision, and preferred to go to the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission rather than go to court at this time.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

AMOUNT GARNERED BY COMPANIES SINCE 1973

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs as well. The minister knows that the report documents the greatest rip-off in Canadian history, for the period from 1958 to 1973 which cost every man, woman and child \$2,500. It says that the monopolistic practices of these companies have continued since 1973. Considering that there have been additional price increases in excess of \$30 billion, will the minister confirm that in addition to the \$2,500 from every citizen in Canada, there have been other rip-offs of billions of dollars, and could he give us a precise amount since 1973?

● (1430)

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, it is very difficult for me to start to speculate on figures. What we have in front of us is a report of an inquiry that went pretty deeply into analysing the operation of the companies. It has come forward with a set of recommendations. It has come forward with findings that will be assessed by the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission and that will allow the companies to respond. I think in all fairness, for justice to be done, it is natural that we allow the accused a chance to present their own defence. At this time I would not want to speculate on things that have not yet been investigated by the director during his inquiry. I think we have sufficient evidence in front of us to allow the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission to hold hearings and report to us in the near future.