

The Address—Mr. Ouellet

member for Saint-Hyacinthe must have a very well-defined position on this matter.

I dare believe that he was thinking about something else when the Prime Minister was talking about what is most important, most basic for any member from Quebec who wants to promote national unity in this country. I was very happy, Mr. Speaker, about several aspects of the Speech from the Throne. First, it gives a significant role to the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs during the next few months, during this session. The Speech from the Throne meets squarely a serious and weighty problem which now faces Canada, the problem of inflation. The Speech from the Throne and the remarks of the Prime Minister show that the government, in cooperation with all members of parliament, clearly intend to amend and improve parliamentary procedure so that bills may be passed more easily, which would enable us to act much more quickly to bring in the legislation required to govern this nation ably. I would be remiss if I did not express first of all what I feel about taking over my new responsibility as Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

I intend to speak not only in the House but also in the public forum with all possible strength, determination and haste in favour of the Canadian consumers.

Some will say that it is practically impossible for a minister to be at the same time the minister responsible for both Consumer Affairs and Corporate Affairs. I should like to correct immediately any misunderstanding about that view.

It is clear that such a statement shows a lack of understanding of the kind and scope of responsibilities coming under the jurisdiction of my department.

In a way, the Bureau of Corporate Affairs is not the spokesman for a client which would be the businessman. It is rather an organization responsible for the orderly conduct of business in Canada in the field of corporations, bankruptcies and investment markets. While seeing that the law is complied with in those fields and while developing projects to update the legislation, the Bureau is acting in the interests of the public, the shareholders, the creditors and debtors. I can see no conflict whatsoever as regards my responsibility towards the consumers.

Needless to say, the same can be said of the competition policy office for the application of the Combines investigation Act, striving for free and effective competition on the marketplace. I see this as the best way of protecting the interests of the consumer. I am convinced that the distribution and redistribution of resources according to the needs and fancies of the consumers can best be achieved by not restricting the dynamics of our current market system.

I think that an effective market based on freedom and common knowledge on the part of both consumers and producers is the best guarantee that the needs of consumers are met.

My department is thought to be the department of consumers, and that is good. But it could also be referred to as the department of the law of economics or of free trade. These are two different ways of describing one desirable reality which we all seek.

[Mr. Ouellet.]

I will now take the liberty of drawing a parallel regarding the role of my department on what is justly considered the most serious problem facing this country, I mean inflation.

We are not on the forefront of the fight against inflation. Within the federal government, that responsibility lies with my hon. colleague the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner), the main advisor on the effects of handling various areas of macro-economic policy.

The Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs however, often viewed as the ministry of micro-economics, has an important support role. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that my department will actively pursue that role within the government's overall commitment to fight the causes and effects of inflation. And I will see to it, within my responsibilities as Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, that such complementary effort is made in order that within the framework of overall measures taken by the Canadian government, inflation may be more efficiently tackled.

Mr. Speaker, in order to overcome inflation every sector in our society will have to exercise restraint. The government undertakes to establish limits and priorities in its own spending. It invites all the other levels of government to do likewise. It is also imperative that industry as well as unions attempt to co-ordinate their respective requirements in order to insure good balance in salaries, prices and profits.

Consumers can also do their share by shopping wisely and by taking measures to conserve certain commodities such as oil and gas which are in limited supply.

In the fight against inflation, the government has three objectives which I support thoroughly. I shall be able to say more about them at two o'clock, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

At one o'clock the House took recess.

[Translation]

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

Mr. Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, when I was interrupted at one o'clock, I was saying that in its fight against inflation, the government is aiming at three objectives: to increase the supply of goods and services, to protect those who are badly hit by inflation and finally to take the necessary steps to discourage unreasonable increases in incomes, prices and profits.

It is clear that the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs can do something there. Our main programs that can help to fight inflation are those related to the Competition Act and those designed to assist consumers.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the government intends to overhaul completely the Combines Investigation Act through a legislative procedure divided in two stages, because it is obvious that the present legislation is not an entirely effective tool in 1974. I tabled Bill C-2 last Wednesday. It is the fourth time that a minister has