

Competition Tribunal Act

sector, to protect it and allow it to grow and flourish in those communities.

There are many parts of the country in which the recession is not yet over. In those parts of the country there are massive lay-offs. As an example I put forward the forest industry in British Columbia. The paycheques and the strength of economy are just not there. There has been tremendous harm done to the people who work in those communities. The small businesses which depend upon them have not only been harmed by the recession, they have been harmed by the tremendous increases in oil prices and interest rates. They have been harmed by the imposition of taxes which the Government has placed on them. They have been harmed by the cut-backs of basic transportation services and of postal services. The irresponsible cumulative effects of the actions of the Conservative Government have severely handicapped many small businesses.

The legislation before us is another example of the irresponsible behaviour of the Government. It has failed to live up to its responsibility to provide that protection to small business, to ensure that there is an adequate framework within which real competition can take place in the market-place. I will now terminate my remarks so that other Members of the House can make their contributions.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Tardif (Richmond—Wolfe): Mr. Speaker, I am also very pleased with this opportunity to take part in the debate on Bill C-91, since it concerns a subject that is very much in the news at this time and that is being discussed and debated in many circles.

It is also a subject that has been studied, analyzed and reviewed for a number of years. One of my colleagues said in the course of the debate on Bill C-91 that there had been six or seven attempts in the past to improve this legislation. I must say that, quite frankly, I think there are some very good reasons for wanting to improve the legislation.

In recent years, Mr. Speaker, as discussions and negotiations went on and appropriate remedies were being considered, we saw a number of mergers and such like and finally came to the conclusion that our economy was increasingly becoming a world of very large corporations, an economy with only a few large financial institutions, and I must admit that these mergers and takeovers were not and are not always in the best interest of the consumer.

I feel that for the time being we should support the Government's initiative, which in the circumstances would seem to be offering an improvement over the previous situation. However, Mr. Speaker, I think that once we have accepted the principle that the situation needs improvement and we are prepared to make the effort to introduce the appropriate remedies, and there is a general willingness to do so, we should also be prepared to take the time to consider what has to be done to achieve the best possible results.

I recognize that it is not an easy subject and that it is not always possible to foresee in advance everything that could happen, but I believe that there is unanimity on a number of points. For instance, everyone recognizes that, more often than not, competition means efficiency and, in most cases, increased productivity. Competition is also to the advantage or in the interests of consumers. In many respects, it is also a major cause of technological improvement. These are principles which everyone must recognize.

However, it seems to me that there are great dangers if the mechanisms provided are incomplete or badly articulated to the extent that the law cannot be effective or useful to solve future difficulties and problems.

In the past few years I have seen situations which are altogether unacceptable, in my opinion. We are now debating Bill C-91 entitled an Act to establish the Competition Tribunal and to amend the Combines Investigation Act and the Bank Act and other Acts in consequence thereof. Various speakers have referred to banks, to the Patent Act and to a wide range of issues, and I think that the average Canadian consumer is lost in that maze of legislative provisions.

Mr. Speaker, it is a fact that this Bill will have an impact on the day-to-day life of practically all Canadians.

I am talking about common situations that can be found everywhere. For example, in our ridings, outside major urban centres, we have all kinds of small businesses which are forced to make considerable efforts to market their products. In many cases those small businesses have to face very well organized and structured competitors who have ready access to huge financial resources. The unfortunate result is that many small businesses are literally gobbled up, not to say destroyed, because big companies are always intent on doing away with competition. There are many such examples.

There are also other factors which in my view are part of the consumer's day-to-day life. We have those big corporations which, in order to strangle, to kill competition, will offer a whole range of products at retail prices that are well below the cost prices of other small retailers.

How is it then possible for a small businessman who does not have the purchasing power of this or that big chain to survive, when he is forced to sell a considerable volume of products at much higher prices, because his cost prices are higher than the selling prices of the big companies?

Mr. Speaker, because of all the many situations that are so detrimental to Canadians and consumers, it is our duty as a Parliament, first, to look for an improvement, but also to look for the best possible improvement. And it seems to me that there are some flaws in the legislation that could be amended if the Government committed itself to clearly and openly protecting the interests of consumers. Of course, there are good points. Let me mention only one, the fact that this is no longer a criminal matter, that the standard of proof will now be the one used before civil courts, the test being the weight of evidence. This is a significant improvement. However, the