

Competition Bill

obligation to keep businessmen on their toes and to let them know there is some law that will prohibit illegal activity. But for the most part, as I said earlier, most businessmen are honest. Any of them who get together to act in a dishonest fashion are probably a minority. Considering the billions of business transactions that take place in Canada annually, very few of our businessmen break the law.

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The next aspect that I like about this legislation is its approach. The minister has followed an approach that I think is consistent with what the Special Committee on Trends in Food Prices said in our first report. I quote from that report:

Certain provisions of the proposed competition act dealing with consumer protection (e.g. misleading advertising, bait and switch selling) be split off into a separate bill and enacted immediately, and not be tied in with the provisions relating to monopolies, mergers, etc., requiring reconciliation with broader policy directions relating to industrial strategy and foreign investment.

Mr. McGrath: That is not what this bill does.

Mr. Atkey: Why did not the minister follow that recommendation?

Mr. McGrath: Yes, you are chairman of the committee. Why not?

Mr. Cullen: As a result of that intervention, we know that the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) is here this evening. I hope he will have something constructive to say, instead of destructive. It certainly would be revolutionary to hear him speak in a positive way for a change. I see the hon. member for St. Paul's (Mr. Atkey) smiling. I know he likes this bill, and a little later I am going to quote a statement made by the hon. member for St. John's East, something he said about this bill last November. Hon. members opposite have now had a caucus and probably think they cannot praise the Liberals too much since we have done a great job in the first year. If they had to be careful about praising us in November, 1973, today they might have to be even more careful.

Mr. McGrath: What about the other recommendations?

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I have only 40 minutes so I cannot deal with all these interjections. I agree with the approach adopted by the minister. I feel that the Progressive Conservative Party would adopt a *carte blanche* approach if, heaven forbid, they were in power. These provisions would be cut to pieces by those who want to break the legislation. We need a careful approach that aims at particular targets. Where illegalities creep into the marketplace, we must deal with them as we should.

One of the criticisms that is levelled at this bill is that it has taken a long time to bring it in, I believe something like three years from its inception. The regulations themselves will not have to be fully implemented until approximately two years after the bill becomes law. I agree with this particular procedure in this instance, and for this reason. Most of the people affected, in fact the very large

[Mr. Cullen.]

majority of the people affected, by this legislation are honest businessmen. As honest businessmen, they should be given the opportunity of meeting the requirements of the bill and not have to gear up and overnight make significant changes which might be to the detriment of their particular business. They have done nothing wrong and they are quite prepared to comply with the regulations; all they are asking for is a little time.

I heard the criticism earlier today that two years was not long enough. I would say to the honest businessman of this country that if he needs a little longer period in order to implement these regulations, I think he will find a sympathetic ear with this government. Some would rush with haste into these things, such as hon. members opposite. I would be a little wary if they were in power because then we would have something to worry about. We are not trying to do anything that is going to be to the detriment of the small businessman. If he does need a little time to implement the provisions of this act, then my view is that the government is right in giving them that time.

What does the small businessman think of this legislation? I should like to quote some of our critics in the press. It is of interest to note that we have received commendations from almost all sources in the press. I note, going outside the press, that Mr. Ruben Bromstein, who at the time was president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Businessmen, a body with some 9,000 members had this to say on November 5, 1973, speaking on CBC radio:

Clearly we are most pleased that the bill has been introduced... basically it is giving small business an opportunity to be protected by the law. And even after a decision has been made that somebody is violating the law, a small businessman will have the opportunity to sue in court to collect damages that have occurred because he has been hit by the people who are trying to drive him out of business, or are in some way affecting his business unfairly.

What we are concerned with here is that the government seems to have made a genuine attempt to catch the errors (at least that's the impression I'm getting from reading these provisions) and to try and, in a staging process, get at the problems that affect him.

Gail Scott, a CTV news correspondent, had this to say:

—the new act does go a long way to regulate continual consumer problems and, if implemented, will bring with it many of the changes that consumers have been asking for.

Mr. Bill Wilson, a columnist for the *Montreal Star*, writing in *Ottawa* on November 5 last had this to say:

There is some consensus in Canada that the consumer deserves decent protection from unfair practices and this is the biggest field where Mr. Gray has moved.

The *Montreal Gazette* for November 6, 1973, carried this headline:

Gray bill arms shopper against unfair pricing ads. Bill allows action by consumers. Athletes may get a break on binding contract terms.

Then I was interested to note that Mr. Geoff Stevens, writing in the *Globe and Mail* on November 6, 1973, said this:

Many of the bill's provisions make simple good sense.

Two encouraging aspects of the new bill are that it would bring a broad range of services (as well as goods and products) under regulation and it would give the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission the power to order a halt to illegal business practices.