

*Private Bills*

parliament asking us to do this favour and give to them a preferred position in our economy. They have asked parliament to endorse an alteration in the capital structure to permit them to engage even more directly in exploiting the people of this nation by heavy sales pressure upon the people to take out insurance policies.

I do not want to get involved in the types of insurance policies which this company may have sold up until now or that it may sell in the future. However, with respect to this company, and I am only singling it out because it happens to be the one before us, there is something with which I think parliament should concern itself more seriously than has been the case in the past. I think it is appropriate and coincidental that the hon. member for Vancouver-Burrard, the sponsor of this bill, sponsored a public bill some weeks ago which contained a principle I believe should be incorporated in this bill.

● (6:50 p.m.)

The house will remember that when the hockey franchises were being bartered about the city of Vancouver was interested in entering a hockey club in the new international league and the franchise was given to some relatively unknown place in the United States. The hon. member for Vancouver-Burrard, feeling as keenly as he does about conspiracies in restraint of trade, introduced a bill in the House of Commons—I do not know its number offhand—which sought to bring within the purview of the Combines Investigation Act the National Hockey League, or whatever its proper name is, so that that body would be liable for prosecution for conspiracy in restraint of so-called trade under the Combines Investigation Act, although the league is engaged in a service. The Combines Investigation Act deals only with material goods and commodities and excludes services from its sanctions and prohibitions.

I wish that the hon. member for Vancouver-Burrard would have been as assiduous in concerning himself with the conspiracies that probably take place between insurance companies in establishing uniform charges for the types of insurance they sell, uniform increases in rates, and in providing similar—and I use these words advisedly and loosely—levels of benefits. This is something with which parliament should be concerned. I think we must make a start in this direction by selecting Pacific Coast Fire Insurance

[Mr. Howard.]

Company because it happens to be before us. When we get to the committee stage of the bill we must ask that there be included within the law relating to Pacific Coast Fire Insurance Company a section which states that this company shall be bound by the provisions of the Combines Investigation Act just as if this company were dealing in a commodity and therefore liable to sanctions under that act.

I submit that there is no difference in the eyes of the purchaser of insurance in regard to a conspiracy between insurance companies to set a common level of rates, to establish common price increases and to establish a common level of benefits. The situation is the same as that of the E. B. Eddy Company which I understand has been convicted three times for criminal actions under the Combines Investigation Act. In one case the conviction had to do with matches, in another it had to do with pulpwood, and in the third case it had to do with a conspiracy to fix prices with respect to paper products.

It does not matter much to the individual how the conspiracy takes place. In the final analysis, companies have conspired together to milk the consumer of his hard-earned income. There has not been that theoretical element of competition which is supposed to exist in our economy.

Insurance companies, because of the type of business they carry on, are exempted from the provisions of the Combines Investigation Act. They are permitted to engage with impunity in conspiratorial tactics, one with another. But a seller of wire fences such as the Steel Company of Canada is not permitted to conspire with other companies to fix prices without being liable to prosecution and, if found guilty, to a fine and so on. It seems to me that is monumentally unfair, especially when we have in the development of our economy a steadily increasing part of it engaged in providing services for people. The providing of insurance falls within the providing of services.

So far the government probably has not given very much thought to this matter. My predecessor in this constituency, the late Ted Applewhaite, raised the question whether banking institutions could be prosecuted for fixing interest rates and the like. He was advised that because they provided a service they were exempted from the provisions of the Combines Investigation Act.

I submit that here we have a similar situation. A company has come to parliament