

Combines Investigation Act

be no regulations accompanying this particular legislation. This amendment would empower the Attorney General of Canada to carry out an action on behalf of a group or class or persons. It is he who will determine what actions are brought, so if a group is clearly identifiable and if the action should result in a favourable judgment on their behalf, the group, being clearly identifiable, could be refunded whatever the court passes down in judgment.

I ask hon. members to consider the thrust of this bill and to view the amendment I have placed before the House with the consumers of Canada in mind. They do not have the same kind of power that corporations have when coming before the committee. The corporations trotted before the committee with their "fancy Dan" lawyers and their reports properly bound up. Some of them even took us to lunch, and we listened to their arguments while they lobbied Bill C-2 down. The one little group which came before the committee was treated with disdain. This group called itself Action Bell Canada. They were treated in an offhand manner. They did not have suits, white collars and ties or "fancy Dan" lawyers, but they were consumers who were concerned about this bill and they came before the finance committee.

There was a fight in the steering committee to even get them there, and when they did appear they were treated shabbily. I was ashamed of the performance of the committee that Friday morning. To me it seems that arguing with this group of witnesses and haranguing them was completely out of line with the purposes of the committee in examining the legislation. That is why I say that all of the representations which were made, except those made by the Consumers' Association of Canada, were made by the well-heeled corporate sector. They had done much research and they were arguing from the standpoint of their particular corporate interests. On the other hand, there were no individual consumers or consumer groups which came before the committee, probably because of lack of funds. The committee held its hearings in Ottawa, so if there was a small group of consumers prepared to come to Ottawa to make a presentation, it was financially difficult.

I point out to hon. members once again that this is a very important amendment. It states very clearly what the minister has run around the country and said in press interviews, and so on. I have been very leary of this minister ever since he said that the anti-profiteering bill was a piece of window-dressing. I have been leary about any legislation he has attempted to steer through the committee. I could go on to reveal the things he said in committee when we were prepared to toughen the punishment for infractions under the legislation. I found that the minister said one thing out of one side of his mouth, and today I see amendments with regard to punishment which are completely contrary to the assurances he gave me as a gentleman. I do not want to hold that against him because he is a nice looking fellow, and I know what his ambitions are; however, one has to keep in mind that he is not here just to serve his ambitions but to serve the interests of the consumers of Canada.

[Mr. Rodriguez.]

I find that it is highly illogical for him to be the minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. How can he have one foot in each camp? The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) says that we have a Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) who stands up for farmers, and that there is a Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) who stands up for labour. Here we have a minister straddling the fence—he is for consumer affairs and for corporate affairs. No man can serve two masters, because he will love one and hate the other. I do not know which one he will hate, but I know which one he loves; that is, the one that prevented him from putting in a class action—

● (1620)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Penner): Order, please. I would draw to the hon. member's attention that he should address himself to the amendment, which is quite specific. We are not involved in a general debate on the estimates of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. We should direct our attention to the phrases and the clauses in the amendment.

Mr. Rodriguez: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize if I got into the estimates of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, but it does have relevance to this amendment which deals with class action. One has to be able to identify the class action that one is interested in. I submit that in the approach to this amendment on class actions, the minister has not seemed to be at all concerned about the consumers of Canada. I say to him, as I say to other members of the House, that if he is serious about consumers and would like to do something for them, he should accept this amendment and allow it to become part and parcel of consumer protection in Canada.

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt in anybody's mind that in discussing competition policy or amendments to the Combines Investigation Act we must obviously address ourselves to the problem of class actions and the right of any group in our society to full recourse to the courts. It is also true that this bill, which has been so eloquently referred to by the hon. member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez), has been around for a long time. It goes back to the report of the Economic Council of Canada on competition policy in 1969. Certainly we can trace it back to 1971. Indeed, three ministers of consumer and corporate affairs have had the rather dubious honour of piloting this bill through the House.

The hon. member who just resumed his seat has some things to say about the present minister. I am certainly not going to take my time to throw bouquets at the minister, but I will say that he has succeeded where his predecessors failed. He has brought this bill much further than the former minister or the one before that. The fact is that the bill before us, with all its faults, having been the subject of some 35 meetings of the Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs, in all likelihood will get through the House before we adjourn for the summer recess. I say that is a feather in the cap of the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Ouellet).

A question was raised during committee stage of the bill as a consequence of an amendment put forward by the