

Combines Investigation Act

of the loss leader being resorted to, the position of the government is that we recognize that there are in this house on both sides members who honestly fear that the consequence of prohibiting resale price maintenance will, in the words of the committee,

... be to enable large and powerful retailing interests to engage in a policy of selling goods at unreasonably low prices for the purpose of destroying the independent retailer.

The government agrees with the committee that under present conditions there does not seem to be any substantial likelihood of such policies being engaged in. We feel, moreover, that unless circumstances arise in the meantime which are not now foreseen, we should await the final report of the MacQuarrie committee before considering any legislation on the subject that the committee is now considering. The government is, however, quite prepared to co-operate to the fullest possible extent with the law enforcement officers, both of the federal government and of the provinces, in the vigorous enforcement of section 498A of the Criminal Code whenever it may appear that the practices forbidden by that section are being engaged in.

Moreover, the government wishes to give close and constant attention to the effects of the legislation now being considered by the house, if it is adopted, and to any practices which may develop either as a result of that legislation or independently of it which would be contrary to the public interest. In the event of any such development which cannot be dealt with under existing legislation, the government will give serious consideration to what other legislative action it may be appropriate to recommend to parliament.

Mr. Coldwell: Mr. Speaker, may I say one word in view of what the Prime Minister has said?

Mr. Speaker: With the consent of the house.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Coldwell: I carefully followed what the Prime Minister has said. He has not, of course, dealt with the point I have made in the amendment with regard to a public board to do some regulation in connection with prices, but I would say this. If the government is giving consideration to these matters, while I think hon. members should express their views on this amendment I would be prepared to say that, after they have done so, I would not divide the house on this question at this time since I realize the validity of the point made by the Prime Minister, namely that it would be difficult to introduce legislation at this session.

Mr. Drew: Mr. Speaker, without its being regarded as a speech on this amendment, may

I ask a question? I am not clear as to the meaning of this amendment. It speaks of "regulation of resale prices" and it says:

... where regulation of resale prices is in the public interest such regulation should be under public control instead of under private control.

The hon. member has not explained in a manner that I can understand just what is meant by that phraseology. I am asking the question as related to the general practice that has grown up in the United States on fair trade practices, with boards administering them; and I am interested to know whether he has in mind that sort of thing or some other system of price control.

Mr. Coldwell: I would say this, Mr. Speaker. Where it is desirable in the public interest to regulate resale prices, it should be done by representations to a public board set up under the authority of parliament.

Mr. Drew: May I extend the question? What I am trying to clarify is this. I should like to know whether the hon. member is proposing a board similar to the fair trade boards in the United States, where a general program of prices is approved, but where the actual fixing of prices is not done by the board, or is he actually suggesting that this board should fix prices?

Mr. Coldwell: I am suggesting that this board should hear representations and then make decisions as to what fair prices will be.

Mr. J. W. Noseworthy (York South): Mr. Speaker, for a week I have had in readiness a forty-minute speech in support of this amendment, waiting for an opportunity to speak to it. I do not know whether I can reduce that speech and give it in less than forty minutes, much as I desire to facilitate the business of the house.

An hon. Member: Try.

Mr. Noseworthy: I shall try hard.

When I was speaking on the resolution which preceded this bill, on November 6, I took occasion to say that in my opinion this legislation was being introduced for political purposes chiefly; that when parliament assembled early in the fall there was a great public demand for some control over inflation and that that demand was taking the specific form of a demand for price control; and that the government, unwilling to introduce price control, offered this as a sop to the public to allay their demand, or to take the heat off, as it were, the demand for price control.

I am still convinced that this is the main purpose the government had and still has in mind in getting this bill through parliament this session. During this debate the leader of the opposition (Mr. Drew) called