

Competition Bill

Proposed subsection (8) reads:

Every person who violates subsection (1) or (6) is guilty of an indictable offence and is liable on conviction to imprisonment for two years.

This total or partial overlapping in sanctions is in itself rather remarkable, but what is even more astonishing to me is that neither the minister nor any other Liberal spokesman has made any attempt whatsoever to justify or explain this. Therefore, in committee we want some explanation of the thinking that led to this double-barrelled approach. I would like to be convinced that the minister understands the marketplace. I would like to be convinced that this legislation has not confused provincial responsibility for fair business practices with federal responsibility for combines legislation. I would like to be convinced that there is compelling reason to infringe on the seller's fundamental right to deal with whom he pleases.

I hasten to say to the minister through you, sir, that much of Bill C-7 is welcomed by all members of all parties, but as a word of caution I say that parts of the bill require extremely careful scrutiny including, in my opinion, the refusal to supply section. Therefore, I urge the minister to proceed cautiously on such matters in the interests of both consumer and businessman alike.

Mr. Sinclair Stevens (York-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, I too am pleased to join in the second reading debate on Bill C-7 as I feel it is rather remarkable that the minister who introduced the bill is so anxious not only to get it through second reading but also through committee. I noticed, when he introduced the bill on March 13, that he concluded his remarks by saying:

I therefore urge the House to give second reading to this bill as quickly as possible so that it can go at the earliest possible stage to committee for detailed but, I hope, speedy consideration and decision.

There are three words there of a nature to indicate the minister's anxiety to get this bill through the House. He says "quickly," "earliest" and "speedy," and this in a speech made by the minister only two days after the bill was introduced in the House. Why is there such a desire to pass it speedily through the House without giving it due consideration at the second reading stage? In the same speech the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Gray) raised an alarm in my mind by a comment he made a little earlier when he said:

Let me now take a moment to pay tribute to the Minister of State for Urban Affairs (Mr. Basford) and to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras) for their efforts which helped lead to the bill now before the House.

If there we needed any reference to undermine our confidence in this bill, that is it—his referring to the Minister of State for Urban Affairs and to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration as if that in some way was a recommendation for the speedy passage of the bill. I would remind you, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Manpower and Immigration is conducting the Unemployment Insurance Commission affair, which is a colossal calamity for this country. At the present time it is costing the taxpayers of Canada something over \$1 billion. The Minister of State for Urban Affairs is attempting to cope with his portfolio, but as was witnessed yesterday by his pitiful little speech concerning what he hoped to do with respect to rising housing prices, I think the House would agree

[Mr. Jarvis.]

that it is certainly a department that needs a new minister.

● (2150)

I make these general comments because, like the hon. member who preceded me, I have serious doubts, not only whether the minister who has introduced this bill understands the marketplace but, more important, whether the civil servants who prepared the bill and told him to get it through the House understand the marketplace. I say that because while there is reference in the bill to the Bank Act and certain amendments are proposed to it, the minister leaves the supervision of competition or lack of competition among bankers to the Inspector General of Banks. That may sound quite innocent, but many members of the House realize that the Inspector General of Banks has a staff of two; that is, the Inspector General himself and two assistants, including his secretary. Is it to be taken seriously that a competition act is going to be administered tightly, in the usual sense, by a staff of one man, an assistant and a secretary, bearing in mind that the banks that he is required to supervise have gross assets of \$80 billion?

Why are the banks put into a sacred position? Why has the government chosen to be so gentle with the banking community? For example, if we are speaking about competition, surely it is relevant to point out that in the last 12 months the banks earned \$358 million, which is more than triple what they earned a decade or so ago. I mention this figure because I think it is relevant to point out that while the banks earned that money, based on the Toronto stock exchange indices we find that the general manufacturing field earned \$47 million; the food processing industry earned \$49 million; the construction and materials industry, \$26 million. Various other sectors of the business community had relatively low earnings compared to the banking community, whose earnings have grown probably more quickly in the last decade—certainly since 1967, the year of the great sell-out by the present government to the chartered banks—than practically any other sector of the business community. In fact, Mr. Speaker, based on the Toronto stock exchange indices listing of January of this year, I was surprised to find that the banking community had the second highest earnings of any sector in the nation. The only sector that had higher earnings was industrial mines.

Instead of giving hasty second reading to this bill, surely we should ask why, exactly, the minister gave favoured treatment to the banking community. And not only why did the minister give such favoured treatment to the banking community, but do the minister and his civil servants really understand how the marketplace operates in Canada? It is very nice to come in with a competition act, it is very nice to speak about competition—it is a motherhood thing—but we must be on our guard because we have a minister who at the behest of his civil servants is trading on the motherhood issue of competition to create more bureaucracy in this country.

Speaking of bureaucracy, surely it is time that people became alarmed, and in particular members of this House, at the fantastic growth of our civil service. In a current issue of the Canadian Tax Journal there is a very enlightening article by David B. Perry who points out that now