

*Sports Franchises*

project in Saskatchewan, but it was supported wholeheartedly and financially by the City of Saskatoon and the Government of the Province of Saskatchewan. This was an application to the National Hockey League which was given—as I anticipated at the time, and I have not had any change in my estimation since—the overwhelming support of the people of Saskatchewan and, indeed, of people across Canada.

Unfortunately, the treatment which the applicants received from the National Hockey League was, as I have indicated, unsatisfactory. It was arbitrary. The hearing which was held on behalf of the Saskatchewan application was a charade. It raised a level of indignation not only in Saskatchewan but across the country, which is manifest in the fact, as I understand it, that there was support not only from this Party but from the New Democratic Party and the Government represented by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau).

The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs at that time was good enough, at my suggestion, to initiate an investigation under the provisions of this Act. On reviewing the provisions of the Act, it occurred to me that the situation in Canada today is far less strict with respect to the provisions of anti-trust legislation than in the United States. What we have in Canada today is a situation where the provisions of the Combines Investigation Act are excluded as they relate to professional sports leagues. In other words, whereas any other business in Canada is subject to the Combines Investigation Act, professional sports leagues are not, and are specifically exempt from the application of the provisions of this Act. They can, in fact, carry on business in combination with each other, arbitrarily set prices, involve themselves in the whole question of player drafts. They have enormous power, enormous ability, by virtue of the exemption granted by the Parliament of Canada, with respect to the operation of their league.

Let me say at the outset that I understand this exemption. I understand it because I know there are particular exigencies in terms of professional sports, particularly in this country, and I feel the vast majority of Canadians would agree to the exemption from the provisions of the Act. But this does not mean that the governors of any professional sport can deal in an arbitrary way with legitimate applications without a fair hearing. The point of my Bill is simply to send a message to the governors of the National Hockey League to let them know that, even though they have been used to running things their own way for a long period of time, legislators in Canada have the ability to remind them that they have a responsibility, a public trust, regarding legitimate applications received from Canadian sources.

● (1650)

I ask Members of this House to consider the legitimacy of the Province of Saskatchewan's application to be part of the National Hockey League in terms of national unity. Also, were it not for the Province of Saskatchewan a lot of the owners of the NHL would not be making the kind of profits they are today. What would the NHL be today without the likes of Gordie Howe? Or the Bentley brothers from my

constituency? The Metz brothers, Bob Bourne from my constituency, or Bryan Trottier, just to name a few of the great hockey players who have come from Saskatchewan.

I am not suggesting that anyone should have the right to come forward and say that because they come from Saskatchewan, or any part of Canada, they have a right by virtue of that fact to have a franchise. The reason I am so anxious to have this Bill go before the Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs is that the Bill simply says that if there is a legitimate application, the applicant must receive a fair hearing from any professional league. There must be legitimate reasons given for the denial of a franchise. I do not think that is asking too much. I want the governors of the NHL to come before the Committee to find out what it is like to get a fair hearing. I am prepared to give them a fair hearing and hear their side of the story, unlike the treatment they gave the Saskatchewan people. They were allowed something like an hour or an hour and a half and the NHL had made up its mind in advance about the whole matter. That hearing was a charade. But when they come before a committee of this House, I can assure them, and I know I speak for all Members, that they will have a fair hearing and we will look at the merits of this matter.

I simply ask the forbearance of Members of this House to have this matter go through to Committee. I realize there are pros and cons to this particular proposal, but this matter has received support from all sides of the House. In Saskatchewan it is a matter of some concern. The people of that Province are watching this debate because they want to see right now whether the Prime Minister and his Party are going to allow this matter to go to Committee. I can assure the House that if it appears to the people of Saskatchewan that this matter is talked out, that will be a message that what was said by the Government at the time of the rejection of the Saskatchewan application was mere words. I say to Members of this House that it is important to let this Bill go forward to the Committee, which is not now seized with any other matter, and to give urgent attention to this matter.

I understand some of the questions which will be raised about my proposal. Fine; we can amend the proposal and cut the cloth to make the suit. If there is any concern by any professional sports league in Canada about the implications of my proposal, if we are concerned about our ability to keep the Canadian Football League Canadian, I can assure Members of the House that myself and Members of my Party will support any appropriate amendment which might be brought forward.

I am not going to speak very long because I know this matter will be given a fair and reasonable hearing, Mr. Speaker. It has already received the endorsement of all Parties in this House. I know the Government Party will allow this matter to go to Committee so we can have a full hearing concerning the implications of my suggestion and send a message to professional sport that, where there are legitimate applications, regardless of where they come from in Canada, all we as legislators want is that a fair hearing be given. Coming as I do from Saskatoon where there are very deeply