

*Competition Tribunal Act*

that its purpose was to protect consumers and that it was not to allow business the opportunity to be involved in mergers, conspiracies and monopolies to the detriment of competition and to the detriment of consumers in our society. Does he believe that Canadian consumers—and he referred to them as ordinary Canadians—are adequately protected and that the purpose of competition legislation is well served by this particular piece of legislation? As the official critic for the Liberal Party pointed out, while the legislation is a step in the right direction, it is still in need of amendment and of a different orientation, an orientation which would put consumers and the interests of consumers first and foremost. Would the Hon. Member comment upon the points I have raised?

**Mr. Murphy:** Obviously I agree with the Hon. Member and he agrees with me about the fact that competition legislation is not meeting the needs of ordinary Canadians or consumers. I believe the legislation could be much stronger. I will not debate whether the legislation of the previous Liberal Government or its proposals for legislation were better than the present legislation before the House. I merely point out that that legislation was never passed by the Liberal Government, which indicates that it was not on its real political agenda. Despite the fact that the Liberal Government has some problems getting legislation through, it was a majority Government for most of the last 15 years and it had the ability to introduce and pass legislation if it really desired to do so. The fact that the Liberal Government did not pass strong and reasonable competition legislation indicates the lack of political will about which I spoke earlier.

In terms of the general question asked by the Hon. Member, there is a difference between being consulted and being consulted. I should like to refer to what happened in the case of consumer associations and others who represent the less powerful in society. They had meetings. They were shown some outlines of the Bill. In some cases they actually agreed with the general direction of the legislation. Sometimes they actually believed that the legislation would do a good job. In other cases they agreed with the legislation because they did not think they would get anything better in terms of competition legislation. Based in part upon our history of not passing competition legislation, consumer associations sometimes agree to passing legislation because they know they cannot get anything better and suspect that a Conservative Government perhaps will never pass competition legislation unless they accept weak legislation such as that before us at the present time. Those groups were consulted and in some cases they agreed with the legislation. However, there were other groups which were never consulted.

Were the labour groups really consulted? Were farmers really consulted? Were other consumer groups really consulted? Yes, there was very limited consultation with some of those groups, but let us compare the amount of consultation which took place with them and the effectiveness of that consultation with the consultation with the Big Five. Over the last seven years I have sat on enough committees of the House

of Commons, as I am sure have other Members, to know that we listen to a number of groups that appear before committees. We will hear 15 or 16 witnesses on a piece of legislation, but some of them have a lot more say than others. Some of the witnesses are there for the clause by clause study. Some of the witnesses have the financial resources to ensure that legislation is written in the way they want it to be written. This is what happened in the case of the competition legislation with which we are dealing today. Sure, you talk with the Consumers Association and with other groups, but the people who had the resources and the ear of the Government were able to dictate the way this legislation was written. As a result of that, this legislation is imperfect and will not deal with the legitimate concern of Canadians.

● (1730)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest):** A very, very short supplementary question from the Hon. Member for York South—Weston (Mr. Nunziata).

**Mr. Nunziata:** Mr. Speaker, having said what the Hon. Member has said, I am sure the Hon. Member for Churchill (Mr. Murphy) will recognize that there is one final opportunity to hear submissions from the Consumers Association of Canada, the Federation of Small Business and the Consumer Protection Association at committee stage. At present we are dealing with second reading of this legislation.

Recognizing that that opportunity exists, can the Hon. Member explain why the New Democratic Party has stated that it intends to obstruct this Bill, delay its passage, notwithstanding the fact that, flawed as it may be, Bill C-91 is a step in the right direction, and it is certainly better than the existing Combines Investigation Act?

Can the Hon. Member for Churchill on behalf of his Party indicate to the House and to Canadians that the New Democratic Party will co-operate with the hearing of witnesses, those representing both big business and small business and organizations representing consumers, in order to try to persuade the Government, difficult as it may be, to adopt certain recommendations in the interest of consumers?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest):** Order, please. I am sorry to interrupt the Hon. Member. Resuming debate. The Hon. Member for The Battlefords—Meadow Lake (Mr. Gormley).

**Mr. John Gormley (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to say a few words this afternoon during debate on Bill C-91 and its ramifications for competition law in Canada and the Combines Investigation Act.

A strong, effective competition law is an essential part of the Government's economic policy. There is a critical need to update our economic legislation. The existing law is out of date and out of touch. The changes being proposed in Bill C-91 will give Canadians an effective, enforceable and up-to-date