

*Competition Tribunal Act*

We have heard some very eloquent comments today from Members outlining their views and their concerns. All of us have seen the national and international chains coming into our community, large and small, and phasing out the small, independent, family-owned business operations. I am sure we are all concerned about this. I know that someone as sensitive to the needs of their community and constituency as you are would have noticed that the national shoe chains will come in and that the independent shoe operator there in downtown Edmonton, or in downtown Red Deer or Kamloops, wherever it may be, is eventually phased out of business because he buys 400 pairs of, let's say ladies and girls shoe a year, whereas a national chain will buy 50,000 pairs a month.

● (1240)

When you have to meet head to head with that kind of a conglomerate, and you are a family-owned shoe retail outlet, there is absolutely no way that you can really compete in economic terms. You can offer better more personalized service, but when it comes to hard, cold pricing it is almost impossible, if not impossible for that small family oriented business to compete with the national or multi-national chains.

This is becoming a way of life in our country. It is now up to Parliament, that reflects the best interests of our country, to decide what is it that we want for our future Canada? Do we want a Canada run by a handful of families and a handful of large multinational conglomerates, or do we want to encourage the development of small independent Canadian enterprise? That is the issue.

Quite frankly, I am rather amazed that my Conservative friends across the aisle are not all standing in unison wanting to speak to this motion. My colleague from Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) said that we want the small independent enterprise to succeed in Canada. We want to see equal competition in the market-place. We thrive as a country when we have independent Canadian businesses working head to head with each other in competition, providing opportunities for Canadians.

I do not think there is anybody in this House who could say unquestionably that it is in the best interests of Canada, the Canadian economy and the people of Canada to have the emergence of large conglomerates getting larger and larger with more power in fewer and fewer hands. In a sense we are taking competition out of the market-place. We are saying if we do not agree with this particular amendment that we do not want to see more competition, we want to see less competition. We do not have to look very far to see lessened competition. Have you noticed, for example, the competition in the banking system, how all the banks offer quite significantly different interest rates? No, you have not seen that. When you get the list out every day you notice that for a deposit of \$5,000 that every financial institution, certainly the big five banks, have virtually identical interest rates. Have you noticed when you

go down to fill up your car with gasoline the tremendous range in pricing at the pumps across the country? No, you have not, because when you look at the oil or gas production in Canada it is done by essentially four firms. While they do not price fix, while there is not a formal cartel or formal monopoly, it is very close to that. I suspect if you poked and scratched long enough in some of those areas you could almost make a case for the cartel approach to oil pricing, particularly for the retailer.

What I am saying is you do not find competition with gasoline for all of our vehicles. You do not find real competition in terms of the services you get from our chartered banks. You do not find competition in the food area when you see so much of it now controlled, or the country divided up, with one corporation in the food producing area taking western Canada, and somebody else taking eastern Canada, and so on.

For a Government that prides itself, at least in theory, on supporting the concept of competition and fairness in the market-place, I am amazed that my Conservative friends are not in their places today in support of this particular motion.

Some people who know the business well, and I don't have to go beyond Cadillac-Fairview Corporation, a corporation that knows the world of corporate concentration well, when they appeared before the Finance Committee went on at some length trying to point out to Members of Parliament the pitfalls of increased corporate concentration, particularly when that corporate concentration includes financial and non-financial institutions as part of the same corporate conglomerate family.

When Cadillac-Fairview stands up and says, take heed of our warnings, Members of Parliament watch very carefully how you proceed on this issue, then it was no surprise to me that the finance committee unanimously—Liberals, Conservatives, New Democrats—said we advise the Government, and particularly in the case of the Imasco takeover, the Minister of State for Finance (Mrs. McDougall), not to allow corporate concentration in the same family of financial and non-financial institutions. It was unanimous and it was felt very strongly by Members. We debated the issue in the House and I do not think there was a single Member of Parliament who spoke in favour of allowing that particular transaction to take place. It is taking place, because when push came to shove the Minister of State for Finance caved in and allowed that transaction. Some of the Conservative Members in the finance committee, with all due respect to my colleagues, said that this seemed to be a good move by the Minister. I do not think it was much of a move at all. The proof of the pudding has been seen in the last few days; even with restrictions in place the corporations can get around this particular, almost self-dealing type of activity.

I am pleased to stand in support of this motion as an effort to reduce corporate concentration in Canada.