

*Competition Tribunal Act*

Mr. Speaker, the situation now prevailing in Quebec's oil industry is sheer madness. How can it be explained that a refinery is taken over in order that it will not be operated afterwards by its buyers? That flies in the face of logic. It is clear that the purchase of such a plant is normally aimed at operating it. But we know the Ultramar Corporation bought the Gulf refinery in Eastend Montreal, not to operate it, but to shut it down. Well, the Gulf-Ultramar deal is a downright political scandal which weighs heavily on the back of the present Conservative Government.

Why the present Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Côté) did not back his Director of Investigations to prevent that deal is incomprehensible. I maintain that the Minister did not do his duty. He has lost the confidence of Canadian consumers. And the Bill he is introducing today is another example of his subservience to the large Canadian companies. What reason did he have to defend Ultramar instead of the consumers of the Montreal area?

The concentration in that industry is so real and important that the Canadian Oil Products Marketing Association claims that Canadian consumers paid \$302 million more than they should have for gasoline just for the month of January 1986. Yet, independent companies in that field are not afraid of competition and have indeed long been calling for a better competition policy to protect them from oil multinationals. Why is it the opposite in the case of multinationals and other large producers which do not want good competition legislation in Canada? And why is the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs protecting oil multinationals?

When the former Combines Investigations Director, Mr. Bertrand, tabled his report incriminating oil companies, I was Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, and I publicly backed the Investigations Director, Mr. Bertrand. I was in attendance when he gave his press conference and charged the large oil companies of Canada on the basis of vast and bulky information. I never failed in my duty to back the Director of Investigations. But what about the present Minister who went in hiding for weeks, who refused to make public the O'Farrell report, written by the present Director of Combines Investigations? When this civil servant, Mr. O'Farrell, published his report, the Minister simply said that it contained personal views and that he himself did not want to get involved. Now, it is an absolute shame for a Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs to refuse to back and defend the Director of Combines Investigations. If the Director is no good, let him go, let him be given the sack, let him be replaced. But if the Director is doing his job in a decent and conscientious way, then the Minister must back him publicly in his action. And I insist, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister did not do his duty and chose to protect multinational companies rather than backing his Director of Investigations and protecting Canadian consumers.

As it stands, our competition law is excessively weak compared to those of other countries. Let us take the American situation as an example. The Americans have one of the best

competition laws in the world, which the oil companies in the United States must obey, a far cry from what exists here in Canada. We should therefore not be surprised, Mr. Speaker, to see that gas prices are much lower in the United States than they are here and that any reduction in the world prices is immediately passed on to American consumers. We hope that situation will finally prevail in Canada. A thorough study of Bill C-91 makes one realize, unfortunately, that this legislation is toothless and will not fill the bill and protect Canadian consumers.

● (1200)

[English]

I would also ask the Minister if he believes that the lack of competition in our country has been beneficial to the Canadian economy. For example, in 1978 Canada's top one hundred non-financial enterprises owned 48.6 per cent of all the corporate assets in the country, compared to 30.6 per cent owned by the top one hundred firms in the United States. Canada has gone through a major recession and, consequently, the 100 largest corporations control more than half of the business assets of our country. Furthermore, there is no proof that these very large companies are now better or more efficient because of their size. In fact, they can be either better or worse, but, unfortunately, there is no documented proof of their efficiency. However, it is certain that their size gives them a tremendous degree of power.

If you define power as the ability to say no, then these very large companies have a definite power, for they have been saying no to competition policy for over 15 years.

[Translation]

The attitude of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in the '70s, in particular, was almost ludicrous. The paranoiac reaction of its leaders to any amendment to the competition legislation completely discredited that body at the time. That is why other groups emerged as adequate and rational representatives of the interests of all business people in Canada. And I seize this opportunity of a debate on Bill C-91 to pay a tribute today to the Business Council on National Issues, particularly to Mr. Tom D'Aquino whose more realistic approach allowed a freer, more serene and serious debate on that matter. I do not hesitate to say that the BCNI has made considerable efforts to better understand the objectives of the Government and those of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and to explain to various representatives of the business community that once and for all they had to reach an agreement with the Government with respect to competition legislation. I know quite well that the Minister has resumed the dialogue and carried on consultations with the business community.

[English]

I understand that Bill C-91 was drafted in collaboration with the Gang of five: the Business Council on National Issues, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Grocery Products Manufacturers