

Competition Tribunal Act

not in the Bill; that is the concern. To introduce this legislation, the Minister had to pay a shameful price. In the name of promoting competition in Canada, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Côté) had to reach prior agreement with the very same people who had prevented the passage of all four of the previous Bills, namely, the representatives of big business. We know who the spokespersons are for big business. Conservative Hon. Members are usually very proud to say that they are the spokespersons for big business. How can the Tories effectively negotiate with the very large families and corporations which have a vested interest in this issue and give to the Conservative campaigns?

It is not as if the Government is resigned, after fighting the good fight, to getting half a loaf in Bill C-91. It has brought about this outcome by deliberately lowering its sights and being afraid to fight for a better economic deal for average Canadians in most of their every-day purchases. Just how much average Canadians are paying for this continuing policy failure will no doubt surprise Hon. Members.

We should take inventory of what this policy failure has cost the country and ordinary Canadian consumers. The Canadian economy, as we know, is highly concentrated. It is susceptible to price increases associated with high tariffs. Domination of markets keeps prices high throughout a business cycle. The cost to Canada for this kind of anti-competitive system has been estimated at 7.5 per cent of the Gross National Product. I will elaborate on that.

In 1984 the GNP was \$416 billion. The cost of economic wastes attributable to the absence of price competition in Canada was, therefore, \$31.4 billion and rising yearly. This estimate comes from a noted competition economist, Mr. A. M. Moore. I do not believe the Nielsen task force looked into this whole area; certainly it should have done so. But there again, of course, most of the representatives on the committees who were advisory to the evaluation were also representatives of big business.

There are further costs to the economy, as Profesor Brecher noted. Highly sheltered markets mean a sluggish economy which is slow to adapt. These non-competitive markets also breed persistent and powerful private attempts at manipulation of the political process to sustain the economic *status quo*. Thus we can see a New Brunswick dominated by K. C. Irving family interests, a Newfoundland dominated by Water Street merchants, or the western provinces, formally dominated by C.P.R., in fact still dominated by Marathon in Vancouver, and or many industries such as the food industry, now regionally dominated by only one or two groups.

This legislation in its weaknesses and omissions will is going to allow this trend to continue. That is a disgraceful situation. It affects every Canadian consumer. I am sure that if the Canadian consumers were only more aware of what the Government is trying to do to them, they would join us today in strongly opposing this very inadequate and, indeed, negative Bill.

• (1220)

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to take part in the second reading debate on Bill C-91, a Bill which in many ways is one of the most important and fundamental pieces of legislation to come before this Session of Parliament. This legislation is about the smoke and mirrors that goes on when the Tory Government is actually asked to make its rhetoric a reality. The rhetoric of the Tory Government is that it believes in the free market, in free enterprise and in letting the market-place make decisions. The history of competition legislation in Canada shows very clearly that it has been the Conservative Party which over and over again has thwarted attempts to make effective competition a reality. We need look no further than at the level and nature of the consultation which took place before Bill C-91 in order to establish the reality in Canada. A Government which professes its belief in competition and free enterprise in fact believes nothing of the sort when it comes to the crunch.

The big five, the Business Council on National Issues, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, the Grocery Products Manufacturers of Canada Association and the Canadian Bar Association—

Mr. Allmand: The Gang of Five.

Mr. Robinson: That Gang of Five, as my colleague has called it, is once again writing competition legislation for the Government. Was there any consultation with groups representing farmers, working people, consumers or the academic community? No. Rather, the Government consulted the Gang of Five. That is not surprising because we know the old saying that he or she who pays the piper calls the tune.

This morning I took the opportunity of looking through the record of contributions made to political Parties during the last federal election. Lo and behold, as I looked through the list of corporate contributions I found that the Gang of Five was very generous indeed, and in most cases its generosity was shared in equal portions by the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party. The big five banks each donated \$50,000 per year to the Conservative Party and \$50,000 per year to the Liberal Party. He or she who pays the piper calls the tune, and we see in this legislation that the big corporations and the big banks have been calling the tune on competition legislation.

What is the effectiveness of this legislation? We have seen many cases of individuals being arrested and convicted of theft and sent to jail, or if fined and unable to pay the fine, sent to jail in default. However, when a corporation steals from Canadian consumers through excessive pricing or many of the other mechanisms which are used to rip off consumers, do corporate executives go to jail for that? Of course not. They write it off as another tax expense.

We in the New Democratic Party believe in economic democracy as well. We do not happen to believe in the rhetoric of the Conservative and Liberal Parties which is that if we have a wonderful free enterprise system in which competition