

Competition Bill

charge such companies with a breach of some law but they could easily have overcharged to this extent. They control the sugar market and so are not subject to competition; they are not going to support the type of bill that is being shoved through this House. The Canadian government could have done two things to control the price of sugar. It could have helped develop a sugar beet industry here, so that it was not held in bondage to the sugar companies and offshore suppliers. But even the sugar industry in Ontario was not protected. A British multinational corporation, part of a large sugar cartel, was allowed to close down the sugar beet industry in Ontario and the Conservative government of Ontario paid farmers to get out of the business.

The other thing that could have been done was to support the International Sugar Agreement. We did not do that because it did not suit the multinational corporations who now control the industry. Without that agreement they had freedom to rook the consumer and the producer, which is what the story in the *Journal* says they were doing very effectively from 1960 to 1973. I asked the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) some time ago about this matter, and he said that we were not signatories to the sugar agreement but we were observers. The government is an observer while the people of Canada get robbed by the sugar companies! The government is an observer, not an actor, and I fear that they will not be actors in regard to this competition bill either.

I had a phone call from Regina from someone who complained that in Denver, Colorado, he paid \$1.89 for ten pounds of sugar while a similar brand in Regina which came in from the United States, cost \$2.69, and Alberta sugar, processed in Canada, cost \$3.29 for ten pounds. Why is that happening to the Canadian consumer? It is at least in part caused by the failure of the government to develop and maintain a large sugar beet industry in this country, and its failure to sign the international agreement which would have stabilized the price worldwide to the producer and the consumer.

A headline in the *Globe and Mail* of March 14, 1974 reads: "Sugar Price Third Lower in Buffalo" and in the article appears the statement:

The price of a 10-pound bag of granulated pure cane sugar at Loblaw stores in Buffalo yesterday was \$1.89. In the chain's Toronto stores the price was \$2.99.

Does the minister really expect this House to believe that this bill will correct that situation? I do not think so. I do not think he would stand in this House today and say that he believes it because no one in his right mind could believe that a simple competition bill will correct such a situation.

This government is not prepared to use the full weight of its power in the interests of the Canadian consumer, and so they will not give any real clout to the board which was set up to look after consumer prices. That is where the crux is. We must be tough. The government will not be tough with these people, as is evident if one reads this bill. If an economist or some agency were charged with the responsibility of investigating thoroughly the prices paid to beef producers in the past three weeks, and the results of such investigation became known, I believe the Minister of Agriculture would have to resign. His program for

[Mr. Gleave.]

protecting the producer has failed. At the same time, the price to the consumer has been hardly reduced.

● (1500)

Why is the Food Prices Review Board not reporting daily or at least weekly on what is happening on the meat counters of Canadian stores? That is where action is required, Mr. Speaker, and it should be taken immediately. If you want to know what restrictive trade practices are being carried on, get a list of industries, go to the library and get a book from the shelf. There are books on the sugar industry and on the meat packing industry. If you read the 1961 report on the meat packing industry you will see that the industry is using exactly the same tactics today in its treatment of the producer and the consumer.

Consider production costs of the farmer. The price of fertilizer has increased by 50 per cent over what it was one year ago.

Mr. Whittaker: In some cases the increase has been 100 per cent.

Mr. Gleave: Yes, the hon. member is right; the increase in some cases has been 100 per cent. That is an extra cost the farmer must bear this spring when he plants his crops. Those engaged in horticulture or grain production have additional costs. What will the government do to meet this situation? Even if this bill passes will mean nothing to the farmer in April, May or June of this year. It will not make any significant difference to his situation. This legislation will not help the farmer unless it is changed. Unless somebody works on the bill, it will mean nothing to the farmer.

I see no evidence of the government's anxiety to do something to reduce the price of food and the cost of food production. Extra costs are being built into the food chain right at the production end. This is bound to do one of two things: increase prices to the consumer to levels he can ill afford, or force the food producer into bankruptcy. This is happening in the food industry. It has happened to people in the beef industry and to those in the hog industry. We are not engaged in an academic discussion; the situation we face is very real.

If by any chance, and I do not suppose there is much chance, we can impress upon the minister the urgency of the situation, this debate will have served some purpose. If we cannot, then I am sorry. I think we should take immediate action in the areas I have spoken about, namely, in the production and distribution of food. Let us dash the hopes of some of the monopolies which determine the cost of living for Canadians. Let us change the present situation in which Canadians feel they are helpless in face of conditions beyond their control and apparently beyond the control of governments upon which they depend to protect their interests.

● (1510)

[Translation]

Mr. Henry Latulippe (Compton): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to discuss this bill today. Bill C-7 is very hard to understand for many Canadians. It provides for amendments which, to my mind, will not solve the problem.