

Government Orders

I have to say to the minister that this is a good piece of legislation. Hopefully we can get it to committee this week. I am happy that we on this side of the House have been asked for some input so that we can address the issue of working capital. There are a lot of good features about this bill.

The minister touched on another very important point in his speech. I want to spend some time on that point today. It has to do with the responsibility of the financial institutions in this country.

With all the good intentions of this House of Commons, this is just a bill. The problem we have had with this act in the past has been the fact that the financial institutions of this country by and large have really not been good partners in the act. The minister alluded to that and I am happy that he did. As Her Majesty's loyal constructive opposition, we are going to make this bill a serious issue with the financial institutions in this country, not just the chartered banks but the credit unions as well. It has been expanded to include the credit unions, the trust companies and others that may be eligible to participate.

We have to do this because we have a situation in this country today where people are intimidated by their bankers. Imagine, the customers are intimidated. Normally if you run a business you look out for your customers. You bend over backward to try and give them good service. You go out of your way to try and keep them on side. With the financial institutions in our nation, it is the reverse. I do not want to say that every bank manager and every bank person in this country is the same. I do not want to tar everybody with the same brush.

The facts are that there are a lot of people in the financial sector of this country who approach their job in an intimidating, condescending fashion which puts the fear of God into a lot of their customers. It ends up hurting the spirit and the productive entrepreneurial juices of this whole country.

I do not want to generalize on that statement today. I want to give a few small examples. As the advocate for small business for my party, I feel that it is my responsibility to try today to sensitize some of the banks to the fact that there are things going on in their institutions that I just cannot believe.

I want to start off by giving an example of a widow who was left a business. By the way, I should say that I have received permission from the people who gave me these examples to use them today.

Most people who have problems with their banks are scared silly. Say one asks: "Would you like me to try and address this story? Would you like me to go and see if I can give you a hand?" They will say: "Oh, no, no, I am afraid of the repercussions. I am afraid that they might cancel my credit card. They might not renew the mortgage on my house. I am afraid that somehow they will get me".

There is this feeling out there that the banks of this country are basically like a cartel. Suppose that I say something nasty about the Toronto-Dominion Bank. Even though I may not bank there, the next thing you know I am going to hear from some other bank that is going to put the squeeze on me.

I think Canadians should understand that, thanks to a Liberal amendment in the Bank Act which went through the House about six months ago, if you as a consumer are not being treated fairly by your banker, it is incumbent upon you to report it to the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, and it is incumbent upon the Superintendent of Financial Institutions to check that complaint. That complaint, if it is legitimate, will be posted in the annual report.

In this first example I want to give, Mrs. Hughes actually had to take over her husband's company, Bolton Electric Contracting Inc. of Bolton, Ontario, when Mr. Hughes died. Mrs. Hughes owed the Toronto-Dominion Bank approximately \$74,000. This was comprised of a loan of approximately \$67,900 as well as an operating line of credit in the amount of approximately \$6,000. These were the best figures available to us and this is quoting from the lawyer who addressed the president of the Toronto-Dominion Bank. They have not heard anything from them as yet, but it would appear that the amount of the loans outstanding at the time of Mr. Hughes' death was this total.

The point here is that this man had paid for a life insurance policy of up to \$125,000. When this man died, the money was not made available to that limit of \$125,000, although all the fees were paid up. She actually owed about \$67,000 at the time of his death.