

Interim Supply

Retail Merchants Association drawing our attention to this serious situation, and I would like to quote from it:

During the last ten years a condition has been developing in Canada which is rapidly approaching the point where a few large corporations are gaining a stranglehold on the retail trade of our country. Unless there is fast legislative action to counteract this trend, small business, the mainstay of free enterprise and effective competition, may be elbowed out of existence.

We have seen similar developments already in the automobile and gasoline industries. The letter goes on to say:

The fact is that competition between the large corporate retailer and the independent retailer is unequal in our present system. The reason for this is that the large corporation has access to millions of dollars in the stock and bond market, which is quite beyond the reach of the small merchant.

The results of this inequality are clearly visible in every Canadian city today. The corporate or chain outlet has vast, new, expensive buildings, parking lots and equipment. The independent merchant is found in old buildings, and with out-of-date equipment.

I bring this matter to the attention of the house because I think that the request which the retail merchants are making is a very fair one. I am not opposed to large outlets; there is a place for them, but there is also definitely a place for the small merchant in Canada. It seems to me that we are justified in advancing loans to farmers for rehabilitation, and I believe we would be justified in extending this principle to the small merchants who are now making this request through their retailers association.

Many farmers, as we know, have been rescued from an embarrassing financial situation by the Canadian Farm Loan Act and I think the small merchant who is now in difficulty deserves access to this same financial service in order that he may rehabilitate himself. The minister already has a copy of the letter from which I have quoted. In drawing this matter to the attention of the government I urge that consideration be given immediately to enabling these independent small merchants to have a chance to survive and to carry on the excellent work they have done in the past in helping to build up the institutions we now enjoy.

Mr. Hamilton (York West): I was thinking as I listened to the debate this afternoon that at least some of the words I have used in the House of Commons in connection with the budget were coming true. At that time I said it was obviously the intention of the government to make this session the quietest on record so that nothing would detract from the effectiveness of their appeal to the people of this country, but I felt their hope in this regard would be very short lived. I think that what we have heard this afternoon

is an indication that no matter what else the government may say, they have not been in control of the foreign affairs of this country, and there should be no surprise at this stage that such issues as are being raised today should be brought up in the House of Commons because the government has totally abdicated its authority to conduct foreign affairs on behalf of the people of this country.

I will not spend any longer in connection with that matter. More than once in the last few days we have been concerned with a very striking chain of events in connection with the activities of another of our cabinet ministers. I am thinking back to the time of the death of the late Sir James Dunn and the various phases we have gone through since that time in connection with his estate. You will recall that approximately a year ago this very important problem was raised in the House of Commons, the question of whether an executor of an estate of this kind should be entitled to hold the office of executor as well as being one of Her Majesty's ministers. Had the government taken the advice given to them at that time I think there would have been no need for the several speeches that have been made in the house dealing with the chain of events which have since taken place. As a matter of fact, in introducing my remarks a year ago, I said that I approached the job more in sorrow than in anger.

Mr. Howe (Port Arthur): Nuts!

Mr. Hamilton (York West): I think that at the time the minister in question undoubtedly had the opportunity to renounce his position as an executor of this estate and might have avoided the stories which we are reading in the press and hearing in the house. As a matter of fact, we have a situation now where this large corporation is being sold to at least two companies which are and have been directly dependent to a great extent on the government. It is an indication that whatever has happened in the government's dealings with them it has helped to place them in a position to acquire a controlling interest in this large company.

To get back to the issue of the ethics involved in a matter of this kind, I might refer, as was done last year, to Jennings on Cabinet Government. At page 86 Professor Jennings quotes words of Mr. Asquith when taking part in the debates of the House of Commons at Westminster, at which time Mr. Asquith said:

The first and the most obvious is that ministers ought not to enter into any transaction whereby their private pecuniary interests might, even conceivably, come into conflict with their public duty.