

competition legislation. All three of us have tabled bills which came up for debate, and in one case in the mid seventies an affirmative vote enabled us to take a giant step towards improving the competition legislation.

Two more of our colleagues, first the Leader of the Official Opposition and Member for Vancouver Quadra (Mr. Turner), and my colleague from Grand Falls—White Bay—Labrador (Mr. Rompkey), were also Ministers of Consumer and Corporate Affairs at one time or another. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition was Canada's first Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

The Official Opposition has no fewer than five Members who have held that portfolio, so we are quite prepared and qualified to analyse this admittedly very complex measure introduced by the Minister, Bill C-91.

And I want to say that we intend to analyse this Bill because, unfortunately, there have been too few successful attempts to reform this legislation, and it has always been a rather laborious process.

That is why I share the Minister's view that, for a number of reasons, this reform is long overdue and we must act without further delay. The Minister said earlier that he would like this Bill to be adopted quickly. Why did he wait 16 months before introducing the legislation? The consultation process surely was important. We recognize that the Minister as soon as he took office had to do some sort of consultation. But consultation is no excuse for inaction. And now, 16 months later, we are faced with a Bill that has its origin in the legislation that was carefully prepared by myself early in 1981-82 and introduced in this House by my colleague, the then Minister Judy Erola, as Bill C-29.

[English]

Let me say very clearly and unequivocally that Bill C-91 is a welcome Bill. However, we must look at it and ask ourselves whether it is better than the present legislation dealing with competition. In many respects, I believe it is. In many other respects it is not adequate. We need to do the job in order to deal effectively with true competition in the market-place. This legislation is far from being adequate to deal and to cope effectively with the current situation.

[Translation]

I find it unfortunate that Mrs. Erola's Bill has been "toryfied", if I may use the term. It is my feeling the Minister bowed before big business pressures and recommendations. The Bill he is introducing today does not really meet the needs of consumers and the multitude of small Canadian businesses that are constantly being bullied and crushed by big Canadian businesses.

● (1150)

[English]

Considering that Bill C-91 is better than nothing, but not enough to do the job effectively, we, the Liberal Party of

Competition Tribunal Act

Canada, will seek to improve and to strengthen the Bill by amendments based on proper analysis within the framework of the legislative committee. We are committed to the improvement of Bill C-91 and we will react negatively to all amendments that could weaken the Bill even further. Our objective will be to strengthen this legislation substantially.

Why is there a need for such a piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker? Competition is the basis of the private enterprise system. Economic theory states that the more competition there is in the market-place, the better it is for everyone: prices are lower due to the wide choice of firms producing the same products and small business, provided it can face the competition, can assume its part of the market and improve its products and services. Consumers will then benefit from low prices and a wide variety of products from which to choose.

[Translation]

The healthier the competition, the better it is for everybody. For instance, in the '60s we started to relate competition and efficiency. Logic would have it that the competition legislation should help and encourage maintaining conditions conducive to efficient competition. As a consequence, competitive and therefore efficient markets were considered to be those that could allocate those resources that are the most urgently needed by Canadian society with the utmost efficiency. From there flowed the principle that efficient allocation of resources results in the highest possible level of material life. Of course the highest possible level of material life for all Canadians was the goal in the '60s, and as far as this party is concerned it still has to be, more than ever, our first and foremost goal. This points to the significance of efficient legislation in the area of economic competition.

[English]

On the other hand, when there is little competition product choice is poor and, in general, prices are high, sometimes excessively high. Consumers and small businesses are hit the hardest. I know the Government has what we call—

[Translation]

—favourable preconceived opinion for Canada's oil industry.

[English]

But whatever this Government thinks, for the majority of the people the prime example of a non-competitive sector in the economy is the oil industry. There is little competition, choice is poor and prices are absurdly high. In a country such as Canada, where many of us depend on gas to travel the great distances that separate different communities, the high price of gas is a true scandal. Consumers and the Canadian economy as a whole are hurt by the oil industry.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, when world oil prices go up, that increase is reflected at the pumps the same day or the day after. But when oil prices decline, as it is now the case, we have to wait for weeks or months before prices go down at service stations.