

● (1125)

LEGISLATIVE AMENDMENTS

Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River): Madam Speaker, we will wait to see the outcome with respect to this matter, but on March 5 the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs suggested that he could place before the House within five weeks the new amendments to the Combines Investigation Act. The minister received from Monsieur Bertrand in his report on the petroleum industry two specific recommendations respecting amendments which should be made to that statute.

Could the minister explain why he has changed the amendments—this was announced in his speech—and changed the procedure by which the Combines Investigation Act amendments will come before this House? Why specifically do we not have that legislation now, so that people can study and comment, and so that a broad segment of Canadian society can provide input? Why has there been a change? Why have we not seen that legislation to this point?

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, it is very clear that if hon. members were to co-operate and adopt bills much more rapidly we would very soon be in a position to consider legislation to amend the Combines Investigation Act. I sponsored in the House a few days ago a strictly non-controversial bill, the bankruptcy legislation. The opposition wasted two days debating everything under the sun except the bankruptcy measure. Once again it proves that members opposite engage in filibustering and prevent the government from dealing quickly with the bills it wants to pass.

As to the competition bill, Madam Speaker, I think it would be useful to consult the parties concerned. I sent to all the big national associations in Canada 21 questions having to do with competition. I expect an early reply from those Canadian associations so that I will then be in a position to make specific recommendations to cabinet. Finally, when the bill comes before the House I hope the hon. member and all his other colleagues in the opposition will adopt that bill very quickly.

DEPARTMENTAL STAFFING

Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River): From his last comments I believe the minister missed the point I was trying to make in my question, Madam Speaker.

[English]

I have one final question in this respect. Over the past few years the minister's department has been depleted in resources in terms of the person-years which have been available to that department, and in terms of adequate financing. The question of reorganization almost appears to be a question of the gutting of that department. We would have much more confi-

Oral Questions

dence in the minister if he introduced combines legislation so that we could see a strong determination in that department.

Would the minister confirm that he has in fact begun a process of gutting the department? The confidence of this House would be restored if the minister would submit strong combines legislation now.

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, we ought to pay homage to the officials who manage that department. They worked facing restrictions in hiring staff and had to make do with a budget which was not increased other than to follow the natural upward trend in the cost of living. They continued the efficient and uninterrupted operations of the consumer department throughout the country. That is an example of sound administration which can be a source of inspiration for other departments. Too often governments are blamed for inflating budgets and hiring personnel, and we are told that we ought to clamp down a bit on government expenditures, so as an example I cite the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs which has been able indeed to cut its expenses and staff procurement while continuing to offer excellent services to the people.

As regards the second part of the hon. member's question, namely, when the bill will be introduced, I can assure him that we are well into the process of drafting, studying and working on bringing amendments to the competition bill. It will certainly be one of the major pieces of legislation of the next session.

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[English]

CANADA DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

DROP IN VALUE OF SHARES—REQUEST FOR COMMITMENT BY GOVERNMENT

Hon. Michael Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. The annual general meeting of the Canada Development Corporation was held yesterday. At that meeting considerable concern was expressed by a number of small shareholders as to the degree of interference and intervention on the part of the government in the affairs of that company. So far the loss to the public shareholders of the company amounts to some \$75 million to \$100 million because of the decline in share values since the interference by the government began.

● (1130)

For many of these people, holding shares in CDC is their only investment in the future of Canada, and in order to restore the confidence of these shareholders in the future prospects of the CDC the government must make a clear and unequivocal commitment that it will not interfere in any way with the affairs of that company, specifically, that the govern-