

*Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act*

I have taken many examples of this to Box 99. The minister of course, may agree with the Scott Paper Company which argued against the truth-in-packaging legislation in the United States as follows:

A woman in a store is a mechanism, a prowling computer—

Some women may be, but I have seen too many harassed women pushing grocery carts in supermarkets, trying to hold on to a child with one hand and get packages off the shelves with the other, at the same time trying to watch a couple of other lively youngsters, in order to have any such comfortable illusions.

Trying under these circumstances to determine which is cheaper, the 12½ ounce package at 73 cents or the 1.8 ounce package at 81 cents is an exercise which can drive any "prowling computer" straight up the wall and turn her into a howling consumer in desperate need of tranquilizers.

I know the minister will tell the House he is going to get rid of all these fractions, and I am glad of that, but this is what the consumer is up against. While the minister might improve the situation, I do not think he will make it nearly 100 per cent as long as he does not embody this per unit pricing factor in the legislation. He may say that women can do just as well without this per unit pricing, but I should like to refer him to a couple of tests that were performed in the United States, one in 1962 and one in 1968.

Both these tests were conducted in the same supermarket in Sacramento, California. In each case there were five college educated housewives employed who shopped regularly for their family needs. I would not suggest that college training necessarily made better shoppers but these women were chosen because it was felt they would be able to discriminate. These groups of women in these periods of time, six years apart, were asked to disregard brand preference and quality. Each woman was instructed to purchase 14 specific average grocery items. They were told to buy the package which, in their opinion, offered the largest amount for the lowest unit cost.

It is interesting to note that the five women had a total of 70 items to buy on each occasion. In 1962, of the 70 selections the group made, 34 were wrong. That is almost one-half the total. In 1968, of the 70 selections made, 38 were wrong, and that is over one-half. In spite of the fact that these were sharp women consumers selecting articles they were buying all the time, the group in 1962 was wrong in just under half of their choices and the group in 1968 was wrong in just over one-half. I think these were pretty fair tests.

I maintain that if those women had the protection of price per unit legislation they would not have been able to go wrong in all those selections which they made. They would have known exactly what the price per unit was regardless of the look, shape or size of the package. This would seem to offer very conclusive evidence that without unit pricing, women on the prowl are not computers.

[Mrs. MacInnis.]

The minister may still remain unconvinced of the fact that women without unit pricing are unprotected shoppers at the mercy of the market. I would like to see him do a little more investigation into this matter. It is all too easy for people who have been used to one way of doing it to say that we are smart enough to outwit deceptive packaging, particularly when the minister is proposing quite a few measures to do away with deceptive labelling and packaging, when he is trying to do away with slack fill, deceptive pictures, and other misleading practices.

• (5:30 p.m.)

I remember that a few years ago one of the ministers' assistants helped me to rectify a case of deceptive packaging. I refer to a package of cod fish fillets with a picture of five pieces of fish shown very clearly on the label. When the packages were opened, and we opened quite a few of them, there were exactly four pieces of fish inside. This may be mildly amusing to some members of the opposite sex in this chamber who do not have to get meals ready, but it is infuriating to women when they count on five pieces of fish, as shown on the package, and they find only four pieces inside.

The minister is doing a good job along these lines, but I wish he would go further. I wish he would put in what was omitted from U.S. legislation. I have given him evidence of it. I referred to the findings by U.S. consumers of the need for the price per unit being put on the package. I gave him the suggestion made by Consumer Reports—a publication with which he is familiar—that the cost would be negligible if the retailers were supplied with easy to use price tables. This would help women enormously. I know very well that the minister wants to help consumers become discriminating shoppers. He has said so himself. The most convincing thing he said was a few moments ago when he declared that he wanted them to come to the committee and make their voices heard. When he actually gets around to wanting to see them and hear what they have to say, I really believe he is in earnest. I will do my best to see that people with discrimination get to the committee in appreciable numbers.

I urge the minister to take to heart the findings of U.S. shoppers. If he really believes that the tests in the United States are not accurate, and that Canadian women may be able to outwit the packaging with the help of this legislation, I would like to offer him a challenge. I would like him to come with me some day to one of the supermarkets and to make a selection, a test, to see which of us could make the best choices. I really think we would both score fairly low on the totem pole. Perhaps the minister would come out ahead of me, I do not know. The hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) has indicated that the minister has come a long way since he started. I know he would be very attentive to many details that might escape me, but I think both of us would do very badly in getting the best value and quantity in those packages. So, if he would like to do that some time after Christmas when his Christmas dinner has had a chance to settle and his new year celebration has become a pleasant memory, I shall be only too happy to have him accompany me to do that test.