

*Weights and Measures Act*

authorities when we come to develop new legislation and regulations. I hope this legislation will be debated in the house in the new session, though of course there is no guarantee that that is going to happen.

There is one other aspect to which I should like to return, and this is the question of jurisdiction in the field of packaging. I am sure hon. members are aware that this jurisdiction does not lie solely within the Weights and Measures Act, but in fact extends over a broad area. I am informed that the act includes an exemption in the form of recognition of the activities of other agencies. These are other than retail premises that pack food, but those which pack specialised products, such as pesticides, which are of course the responsibility of the Department of National Health and Welfare, food and drug directorate, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Fisheries.

To enact legislation dealing with aspects of this sort, Mr. Speaker, would require co-ordination among many government departments, which would not be difficult, given the proliferation of interdepartmental committees that are supposed to be dealing with these questions. Somebody once defined a committee as a group of the unfit to do the unnecessary. However, with the complexities of modern government these committees perform valuable services, even though the speed with which they make decisions and process information is very slow indeed, to say the least.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, all legislation having to do with various aspects of weights and measures and packaging would have to be amended. Other provisions in provincial jurisdictions that carry specific requirements in regard to certain products and which are valid only to the extent that they do not offend federal responsibilities would have to be amended as well. This would probably require some federal-provincial conferences so as to deal more generally with the whole concept.

I hope that the new department of consumer affairs will have primary responsibility for this problem, instead of the Department of Trade and Commerce, which is more technically oriented. Their interest, their scope, their constituency if you will, is much broader than that of the Department of Trade and Commerce when it comes to protecting the rights of the consumer. How successful the new department will be largely depends on whether or not the consumers of Canada are able to take advantage of the educational

information which, we are told, the department is to produce, as well as on how impressive are the legislative changes that we are able to make at the federal level to deal with these problems.

I think it is fair to say that the reduction in drug prices which we had hoped would take place with the repeal of the sales tax on drugs has been very small indeed. The powers which the federal government has within its jurisdiction are limited; largely, they can only attack the problem indirectly. The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Turner) is seeking, through his bill to amend the Patent Act and Trade Marks Act to do this. The idea is that by removing some of the protection the drug industry has enjoyed, competition will be encouraged and drug prices will be forced down. Again, the government's attack is not direct but indirect. Whether that government measure will succeed will depend on two things, of course: the vigilance of the government in publicizing the lack of success it has enjoyed through following direct methods, and the ability of the consumer to take advantage of competition, to pressure companies and, if necessary, to boycott products on a national basis. I do not contend that the government has the responsibility of protecting the consumer; the consumer is responsible for his own protection. But I do think that the government should ensure that the consumer gets all the facts that are available so that he can make his own decisions.

Many tools are at hand to help consumers, and here I am referring to *Consumer Reports* magazine, to which the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) referred. Or, the consumer could join the Canadian consumers organization, which publishes a monthly booklet. Similarly the consumer can use his God-given intelligence. Also he need not buy on time; thus he can avoid being locked in with a finance company.

Another difficulty our consumers are faced with stems from the attitude of regarding as necessities certain items which are luxuries. Often people spend much money unnecessarily. One cannot blame the business firms for that; to a large extent consumers are to blame for allowing themselves to buy things which are not necessary. That has always been a problem and will always continue to be one.

I conclude by saying that I find this bill interesting since it focuses our attention on the problems of our consumers. Nowadays the consumer moves in a highly technical field of