

Corporate and Consumer Affairs

by the minister I say this bill is a betrayal of the Canadian consumer. It gives him no assurance of protection from the monopoly situation, none whatsoever.

The minister asked me to point out the constitutional authority. That is what he is going to do when this bill becomes law. He will ask, "What constitutional authority have I to act"? That is what he is going to say when prices go up and up and up. He will say, "I cannot do a thing. I have no power. There are no teeth in the bill and if I do something it will be construed as unconstitutional because I will be invading a field that constitutionally belongs to the provinces. However, I have got a beautiful bill. The title sounds real glamorous". That is the beginning and end of it. A beautiful bill all tied up with ribbons.

As recorded on page 3211 of yesterday's *Hansard* the minister said:

—I believe we are following implicitly the recommendations contained in the interim report of the Economic Council,—

Then this queer phrase followed as part of the same sentence in which he said he believed implicitly he was following the recommendations of the Economic Council:

—in some cases less and in some cases more.

He is implicitly less and implicitly more. The fact is that the minister has put the cart before the horse. If it was not for the desire of the government to create this glamorous facade with which to cloak the young and personable minister, to picture him as a kind of white knight riding with lance levelled to the aid of the consumers, all that was really and honestly required was to put clause 6 of this bill in the existing Government Organization Act which created the minister's department. That is all.

Mr. Hees: It is a rubber lance.

Mr. Nielsen: Yes, his lance is a rubber lance.

Mr. Turner: Remember the night of the rubber knives, George?

Mr. Nielsen: In brief, Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the house want the Canadian consumers to know whether the price increases from which they are suffering such hardship are justified, and if they are not justified we on this side of the house believe that the consumers are entitled to have something done about them. There is nothing in this bill to satisfy either of those criteria.

[Mr. Nielsen.]

It is all very well for the minister to raise constitutional issues and say it is not proper for him to enter these fields. I would remind him that parliament is not a body without power. Under clause 6(2) there is provision for co-operation with the provinces on research. What is wrong with making a similar provision with respect to the increasing costs of consumer goods? We want the facts on these matters and if a serious abuse of privileges exists, as a result of which the Canadian consumer is being squeezed by monopoly groups, and if the farmer is being left out in the cold by the same groups controlling the distribution of essential food stuffs, we want to know and we want the government to bring remedies before us for consideration and passage, remedies upon which parliament can act. If these things are not so, we want to know that too. We are asking the minister, as we have asked the government so many times in the past, even as recently as the budget debate, to take responsibility. Instead of creating another study or another task force, or another council or another body, why does the government not take responsibility?

● (4:40 p.m.)

We received today and last evening a tremendous public relations edifice from the minister filled with beautiful phrases, laudable targets and, indeed, golden objectives, but completely lacking in any means to bring these things about. If I am wrong I am sure everyone will be pleased to hear the minister rise in his place to indicate how we are going to control food prices. I should like to hear him say how he intends to bring prices down and how he is going to prevent unconscionable profits. How is the Canadian consumer going to be protected against inordinately high food prices? Apparently the minister cannot tell us this.

To borrow a phrase from political history, if I dare, the minister has produced a solid gold Cadillac which has no gas. He has his foot down to the floor on the accelerator with the back wheels jacked up and he is going nowhere. He has even got a horse but his horse is going in the wrong direction. He is expecting the cart to be pushed by the horse instead of pulled. All we are asking the minister to do is to gas up this vehicle and get it rolling. We are asking him to do something about high prices. The situation is much too serious for meaningless phrases and empty public relations facades such as this bill represents. The consumer needs protection but this bill is not going to provide that protection.