

Broadcasting Act

get good packaging and labelling in respect of the food products we eat but to make sure we have proper regulations and laws to ensure that the products which feed the minds of our children are pure, unadulterated and not dictated by the self-interest of some manufacturer who wants to sell as much as possible regardless of the consequences.

Mr. Lloyd Francis (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, there was a bill standing in my name on the order paper today but I was very pleased to let it stand and give precedence to the bill we are now discussing, in view of its timeliness during the Christmas season and its importance in terms of policy which must be developed in this area.

I congratulate the mover of the bill, the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath), and the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis) with whose remarks I find myself in substantial agreement. Unfortunately, I will have to restrict my remarks because of the limitation of time and because I know the hon. member for Algoma (Mr. Foster) is anxious to speak in this debate.

The hon. member who introduced the bill has on previous occasions raised this matter. He had a very interesting exchange with the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Basford) before the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs on March 16, 1971. The minister at that time recognized that a good deal of concern had been expressed by consumer groups, parent-teacher associations, committees for the welfare of children and other organizations concerning food and toy advertising which is directed not only at the adult, who will presumably make the purchase, but at the child himself.

The minister admitted that in a modern society this is a matter of very deep concern and one which was quite rightly receiving the attention of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and of the Canadian Radio-Television Commission. He said on that occasion that it seemed desirable some attempt should be made to draw up acceptable rules according to which the television salesman, so to speak, should be able to bring his message into our homes and speak to our children.

The minister went on to point out that his department already has considerable jurisdiction over advertising. Under the Combines Investigation Act it has jurisdiction over misleading advertising generally, including, of course, television advertising. If there were in any advertising directed at children something which could be presented in court as materially misleading, that would be a basis on which to consider launching a prosecution under the Combines Investigation Act. As hon. members know, there has been greatly stepped-up activity over the last couple of years by the Combines people in investigating and prosecuting cases of misleading advertising.

Furthermore, the department has the responsibility, on behalf of the Canadian Radio-Television Commission, to review and approve food advertising on radio and television to ensure that it contains no element of fraud or misrepresentation within the meaning of the Food and Drugs Act and regulations. Such supervision is designed to ensure the truthfulness of advertising with respect to food products whether directed at adults or children. The

responsibilities of the department, as the minister said, are quite precise, whereas the Canadian Radio-Television Commission has a much more general responsibility under its regulatory powers to determine the nature and kind of advertising that is carried on the electronic media.

The hon. member for St. John's East urged before the House committee that there be even closer liaison between the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and the CRTC to see what jointly could be done to deal with the question of advertising directed at children. He agreed with the minister that it was necessary that there be greater in-depth studies as to what would be the best way of regulating such advertising on radio and television. The member suggested that any such study should include the advice of child psychologists and psychiatrists who would be able to assess the effect on a child of the constant barrage of high-pressure sales messages to which children watching television are subjected every day.

I understand that the complaints section of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs has received a limited number of complaints about TV advertising directed at children and that most of these were received toward the end of 1970 during the Christmas toy buying season. That is why our debate is particularly appropriate at this time. One type of complaint which evidently related to toys—this was referred to by the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway—was that the commercials were likely to mislead children, through trick photography and the like, about the actual dimensions, the speed at which the toy ran or the parts that came with it, thus giving the impression that the toy being advertised was something other than what it really was.

Another type of complaint was that TV advertising of this kind could cause parents of very modest means to spend beyond their incomes and go into debt to buy advertised toys so as not to appear stingy or careless of their children's happiness. Feelings ran so high about the alleged malpractices or unethical or undesirable practices in the field of advertising directed at children that there emerged in the province of Quebec at least one organization specifically and exclusively concerned with the subject, calling itself the Movement for the Abolition of Advertising Aimed at Children.

• (4:40 p.m.)

It seems to me that while there are some special concerns related to advertising directed at children, the attention being paid to it is but one part of the proper questioning which is going on concerning the role of advertising in our society. Leaving aside the question of false or misleading advertising which everyone agrees should be eliminated from the market, there is a feeling in some quarters that there is an excess of advertising as such. We feel that we are being bombarded with demands to buy, and often in terms which bear little relationship to the actual merits of the product concerned and little attention to why we ought to buy.

I want to make it clear that I am not attempting to knock the role of advertising as such. Clearly, it seems to me, advertising plays a very important and necessary role in our type of society and economy. It helps to bring to the attention of the buying public the great variety of goods