

*Supply—Consumer and Corporate Affairs*

fault that this bill has not been proceeded with.

There has been criticism of the fact that we in this party have been both insistent and persistent on the question of proceeding with Bill No. C-190. I want to point out that the correspondence I have received indicates that this criticism of our actions has not been widespread. I think that the great majority of the public were supporting the members of the New Democratic party in their urging the government to proceed with the bill which, in our opinion, would be of considerable help in reducing the price of prescription drugs.

I was interested to note when I was in Edmonton last Friday an editorial in the *Edmonton Journal*, which is a well known supporter of the Liberal party. The heading of the article read: "Drug prices bill: The N.D.P. is right". The article went on as follows:

Mr. Allan MacEachen said in the Commons that the N.D.P. charge of "political considerations" in the government's refusal to bring about a vote on a bill designed to reduce prescription drug prices almost made him gag.

The minister of health appears to be highly selective in his choice of things to make himself gag. A great deal has happened in the Commons in recent years to make even a person with a strong stomach gag. But the N.D.P. efforts to have this important bill dealt with now is not one of them.

The urgency of the matter is pointed up by the announcement of price increases, up to 30 per cent, by a major drug company. Perhaps its theory is that the best defence is to attack. But Canadian drug prices already are the highest in the world!

The bill on which the N.D.P. wanted a vote is not an N.D.P. bill. It is a government bill to amend the Patents and Trade Marks Acts in such a way as to force down retail prices. It was introduced by the government with a great flourish in a manner designed to extract the maximum political mileage from it. It has been given second reading—approval in principle. But a terrific lobby has been raised against it by the pharmaceutical industry.

Quite rightly, the N.D.P. did not want to see it die on the order paper.

But not only did the government set its face against third reading before the recess. It also refused to give any undertaking that the bill would be the first order of business when the house reassembles April 23.

It is sad to see the urgent business of the nation neglected in this way. But it is not out of harmony with the bumbling and fumbling the nation has come to expect from the Liberal government.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, I submit that the attempt of this party to persuade the government to bring down this legislation before we recess has not met with widespread criticism but, on the whole, has been supported by a great many of the people of Canada and by a goodly part of the press of this country.

[Mr. Douglas.]

Our concern, Mr. Chairman, has not been just with having this measure passed before the recess. What we had been primarily concerned about is the danger that this legislation would be dropped. The fact that there has been a very powerful lobby by the drug manufacturing companies is well known. To our minds there seemed to be every indication that the government was beginning to change its mind, that it was beginning to lose its determination to see that the bill did become law. That is why we have repeatedly asked the government for some assurance that the bill would be passed.

If the bill is not to be passed before the recess, Mr. Chairman, then at least we need a commitment that the legislation will be dealt with immediately after parliament reassembles on April 23. This is why I asked the Prime Minister yesterday the question I did, and I want to put once more on the record the reply of the Prime Minister, which is reported at page 8058 of *Hansard*. His reply was:

But I have already indicated, Mr. Speaker, that we consider this as priority legislation, and it certainly is not that we are determined not to proceed with it. We are determined to proceed with it, but we have indicated that we feel this should be after the recess. We will not be proroguing; we will be adjourning. On our return—and I have discussed this matter with my colleagues in the cabinet, all of them, some more individually perhaps than others—there will be two items of legislation which really have top priority. One is this bill; the other is the Kennedy round negotiations which are matters of very great urgency in the trade field. I think we should proceed with those two items immediately on our return, and my colleagues in the cabinet agree with me on that score.

I should like on behalf of the members of this party, Mr. Chairman, to say that we are very happy to have that categorical assurance from the Prime Minister. We take this as a commitment not only from the Prime Minister himself, who unfortunately is not likely to be leading the government when we reassemble on April 23, but also as a firm commitment from all members of the cabinet.

In all probability the next prime minister will be one who is a member of the present cabinet. We feel that this commitment is binding upon whichever of the candidates is selected as leader of the Liberal party, and consequently prime minister of Canada. We shall be pressing the government very hard, and urging the new prime minister to carry out the commitment made yesterday by the Prime Minister.