

Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act

directions which we will bring in later. But in the meantime I urge him to consider this amendment. In conclusion, I should like to again read the amendment. We are proposing a new clause 4 in Bill C-180, which would read as follows:

Where the Governor in Council is of the opinion that practices or manner of marking price and quantity of a product on a container are likely to lead to deception of the consumer on the value of the product, on the recommendation of the Minister, the Governor in Council may prohibit the sale of such products as may be prescribed unless such products are marked with the unit price in accordance with the regulations.

This wording is wide open. If the minister should want to try out unit pricing with regard to only a few items which are deceptive beyond any shadow of doubt, let him try it. But I urge him to give himself these discretionary powers so that he will not find it necessary to come back to the House to have them incorporated in this legislation in a relatively short space of time. I urge him to do this so that the bill will provide genuine protection to the consumer in the matter of packaging and labelling.

Mr. A. D. Hales (Wellington): Mr. Speaker, I should like to say a few words concerning the amendment brought before the House by the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis). I believe she is sincere in respect of what she wants to do, but I suggest that what she has in mind is impractical and would be very costly if made operative. She has in mind that if a ten-ounce package of soap, for example, is priced at 50 cents, it should have "5 cents per ounce" written on the container. The best argument I can think of against this is that if this idea were a good one, those who use the marketplace to sell their products would adopt it smartly. If it would sell more goods more quickly and if bigger profits could be captured, those in the marketplace would adopt this suggestion very quickly. So I do not think we need consider putting it in the form of legislation.

I believe, also, we should consider the great cost to the consumer of accepting such an amendment. I can think of the situation where a retailer or dealer might have 50 or 100 cases of an item which he intends to put on the shelf at a reduced price because it is not moving. Then perhaps he would be told that according to this amendment he would have to mark the unit price on each item, and because of this he might decide that it is not worth the trouble. If this legislation were in force, the government inspector could come in and say that the labels were not properly marked and the dealer might decide that rather than going to the trouble of making all the changes, he would not put the item on as a special but would leave it at the regular price. I believe the hon. member has overlooked this practical aspect of her amendment. I would simply say again that if it should be a good thing to do, the people in the marketplace would adopt unit pricing.

Mr. Max Saltsman (Waterloo): Mr. Speaker, I should like to say a few words in support of the amendment of my colleague, the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis). The purpose of the amendment is an attempt to establish the basic principle of the unit price.

[Mrs. MacInnis.]

While we recognize there are circumstances under which this might not be possible, we believe it is important that it be established as a principle by the federal government in a number of different ways, depending on which might be the most practical. Our concern is that the minister accept this principle as being worth while in protecting the consumer.

Questions have been raised about the legality of doing this. It has been suggested that the combines legislation might not permit such pricing. There might be circumstances in which this would be true. I think one of the ways of getting around that problem is to make provision that there be a space set aside on the package for the total price and the price per unit. This would enable the retailer himself to put on the price per unit and would take care of situations wherein the price is different in one establishment as against another. One might argue that the retailer is perfectly capable of doing that now, and this is true.

● (8:30 p.m.)

The importance of what I am suggesting, and the reason I feel it should be done under this legislation, is that it in fact would be an indication from the federal government to everyone at the retail level that we consider this practice to be of major importance and a good move in terms of assisting the consumer. I think such a provision in the legislation, such a position taken by the federal government, would move the retailer more rapidly in the direction of unit pricing than might otherwise be the case.

Surely, if the minister feels that there are circumstances under which he cannot get the legislation through on the basis of insisting on unit pricing at the factory level, I cannot see that he would have any reason to argue against making provision for leaving space on the label of the package for this purpose. The retailer has to stamp the price on the package; this is common practice. He could easily design a stamp—I am sure that if such a stamp has not been designed, it could be done—so that the price of the package would be set on one line and the price per ounce or gram on a lower line. With one stamp he would accomplish both purposes; he would give the total price of the product as well as the unit price. This would go a great distance toward helping the consumer.

I think all of us at one time or another have been confronted by consumers who have explained the difficulty they have in trying to assess what is the best buy and the best value. I am afraid I am not quite as sanguine as the hon. member for Wellington (Mr. Hales) about believing that if the marketplace thought it were good, it would do it. One of the reasons most of us are here is that the marketplace needs some assistance in moving in the right direction from time to time, otherwise we could abdicate all our responsibility to the marketplace.

I do not think the hon. member for Wellington is really saying that his suggestion would be a great help. The bill that we are discussing is obviously an attempt to correct many of the deficiencies that we think exist in the mar-