

Borrowing Authority

with which any parent could identify. Unfortunately, when the food and drug regulations were brought in this issue was omitted. It is not a sin of commission but of omission.

In the 1960s when food and drug regulations were brought in, the Government felt that when people went to grocery stores, they should be able to know what they were eating. They should be able to pick up a can of soup and read the ingredients on the label. We know that now, in 1988, the Canadian appetite for food is changing rapidly. We know that many Canadians eat out more often than they eat in their own homes. Why have the food and drug regulations not kept pace with the times? Why have the food and drug regulations not reflected the fact that most people do not always cook their meals at home? Many people are often forced to eat on the run, and it is not practical in 1988 to tell a person with an allergy that the only way to deal with that allergy is to eat at home.

I thought that I would speak to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) privately and tell him that there is obviously a loophole in the law. As I did more investigation, and I had some tremendous help, support and information from the Canadian Allergy Information Association and the president of that association, Mrs. Susan Daglish, I became aware of the fact that approximately one person in Canada dies every month as a result of an allergic reaction. We do not know how many more end up in hospital or how many more have unreported seizures, because that type of data is not collected.

I do know that I told the Minister that there seems to be a loophole in the law. I said that if we could get an agreement, perhaps changes could be brought in. I did not want to make this a political issue. I would rather have the Minister bring forward amendments to the Food and Drugs Act which would include labelling of fast foods, as a start. I recognized that this would not be an easy solution or a quick-fix. It would not save every life, because in some cases there are other impinging factors. However, it seemed to me to be a reasonable request.

In this day and age when companies are spending thousands and in some cases probably millions of dollars on fancy packaging and gimmicks to catch the eye of the consumer, at the very least Canadian consumers should have the right to know what it is they are eating. When Canadians go out to get an apple turnover or a hamburger, whether it is called a Whopper, a Big Mac or whatever, it would be nice for them to know what they are eating. Since that right was accorded to us for groceries back in the 1960s, and we know that today fast food is much more prevalent, why can we not have the same right when we go out to eat in restaurants?

I was a little naive. When I raised the matter with the Minister, he said he would look into it. I did not hear anything further for a month or so, so I decided, in order to stimulate the discussion, that I would bring forward a resolution. In fact, I raised the issue with the Standing Committee on Health and Welfare. I must say that the response of the Chairman, the

Hon. Member for Oxford (Mr. Halliday), who has a medical background himself, was most encouraging.

Conservative members of the committee agreed with me that something should be done about food labelling and, in fact, they summoned the Minister to come before the committee to explain why there is no requirement for labelling of fast food at the moment. What we heard was a litany of excuses longer than the menus at most fast-food restaurants. The Minister said he could not do it because some restaurants sell hamburgers and hot dogs in the same packages and, God forbid, some restaurants may use peanut oil when cooking. It was a response from a Minister who had made up his mind that he would not go ahead with this and who then needed to summon all his arguments as to why he could not. It was not the response of a Minister who should be showing leadership and telling his Department that he wants this done and showing the vehicle to carry it out.

No one is suggesting that if we legislated labelling all of the problems would be solved tomorrow and all the labelling would be proper as of tomorrow. Obviously that is why we have regulations. That is why we permit the Government, in its wisdom, to come forward with Governor in Council decisions relating to issues like labelling. There may be exceptional cases or anomalies that cannot be encompassed in the legislation. That is why we tell the Minister that he has the discretion to come forward with a package which will meet the basic need of Canadians to know what they eat and still take into consideration the fact that at some point there may be matters that are not covered by the legislation.

What I saw was a Minister who was simply prepared to come before the committee to give us a bunch of excuses and to even go so far as to blame the families of the victims, to blame people who died because there is no labelling on fast foods or restaurant foods; the victim did not know that in the case of an Arby's turnover, for example, there are hazelnuts ground up so fine that the eye cannot see them.

The Minister even had the audacity to suggest that people who have severe allergic reactions should consider not eating out. In this day and age the Minister should not be giving reasons and excuses, he should be coming forward with legislation to deal with the problem.

Certainly the members of the Health and Welfare Committee did agree that we should move with legislation on this. I am very sorry that instead of accepting the view of all the members of that committee, including the chairman who has a medical background, the Minister was merely there to provide excuses. Now he along with the rest of his Government is asking for \$25 billion to carry out the programs of Government. He is asking for the authority to borrow money to permit the Government to carry on with its other functions. I say that in order for the Government to be accorded borrowing authority, it has to display some sense of responsibility.

In the case of the fast-food labelling issue, the Minister has not displayed responsibility, caring and concern for Canadians,