

have been watching the situation there, has failed to see what I think is the central weakness in the United States legislation, the glaring omission that left consumers without the protection that they needed. What the United States bill left out was the real tool that shoppers must have if they are to determine the best value for their money. That tool is legislation that requires each package on the shelves to carry a label declaring the price per unit of the product inside the package. This provision is required in this bill and I hope there is sufficient representation before the committee for the minister to pause and to reconsider this legislation.

In case some hon. members are unfamiliar with the term "price per unit", may I briefly give this little summary taken from *The Machinist*, an American paper which puts the definition forward very succinctly. In the September 17 issue there appeared the following:

Unit pricing is the practice of stating the price per unit (pound, quart or pint) as well as the price per can or other package.

If you know the price per unit you can far more readily compare values and select the item offering the best value, regardless of its particular shape or size—which may be very deceptive.

You can see the difference in cost among different brands, different sizes and different versions of the same food.

The greatest differences revealed by unit pricing are often between the store's own brands and the national brands. But there are differences among the national brands too.

The hon. member for Wellington-Grey-Dufferin-Waterloo expressed fears that this legislation would cause the minister to become dictatorial on the issue of the size and shape of packages. I notice these fears were also expressed in an editorial that appears in the *Journal* on November 5. The editorial questioned clause 11 of the bill and had this to say:

—Section 11 of the bill . . . says the Minister may make regulations to avoid "an undue proliferation of sizes or shapes of containers". We see the intent: too many shapes and sizes make it hard for a customer to compare weights and prices. Yet—telling a manufacturer to label his goods honestly is one thing, but telling him he must use only such and such a package or container is moving into freedom of enterprise. It may not be a grave intrusion of free enterprise, but any such intrusion becomes a precedent and this one should be closely questioned by the opposition.

I imagine that in general this is the sort of fear expressed by the hon. member for Wellington-Grey-Dufferin-Waterloo. What a unit pricing system would do is remove this fear. With unit pricing, it would not matter what was the size or shape of the package. If the price per unit were stated on the package then consumers in general could tell exactly the value of what they are getting. I notice this question as to why there has been no unit pricing included in United States legislation has been asked in a number of places in the United States by consumer organizations. It must be remembered that consumer organizations in Canada as a rule have not caught on to this because they have not had familiarity with the Fair Packaging and Labelling Act of the United States. Consequently, they are unable to realize the shortcomings from their own experience. This is why I fail to see why the minister cannot take advantage of United States

Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act
experience in order to avoid Canadian consumers having to go through a period of trial and error, having to learn the hard way.

• (5:20 p.m.)

Let me quote from the June issue of the 1969 edition of *Consumer Reports*:

Why shouldn't all packages be labelled with the price per pound or pint or other relevant unit? In considering such a requirement, the drafters of the Fair Packaging and Labelling Act decided it might be too costly for the small independent grocer. Since manufacturers could not usually print prices on their packages without violating the laws against price-fixing, the price labelling job would fall, as it does now, to the retailer. But regional offices of supermarket chains could readily include unit prices on the master price lists sent to all store managers, and suppliers could equip small groceries with easy-to-use price tables. The extra cost, if any, would probably prove negligible.

I might add that the savings to the consumer would prove considerable, not only in money but in time and worry expended by women while they are fussing and wondering about which package offers the best value. Actually when this legislation was before Congress it had a provision for standardizing packaging which was at least a little more protective than our legislation. It required packages in sizes of pounds and half pounds which would allow the consumers to understand how much they were getting for their money. The Congress committee of the House of Representatives threw out this provision as a result of pressure by large commercial interests in the United States.

This is not an excuse for our minister to leave unit pricing out of his packaging and labelling bill. I hope the minister will reconsider and put it in. I might point out that in Canada there are many consumers who are concerned about this. I should like to quote from a brief I received not long ago from the *Fédération des Magasins Co-op de Québec*. Let me read this little quotation:

[*Translation*]

Another aspect which has not been considered in that bill and which we are questioning at length deals with the application of the price per measure and unit. This measure enables consumers to choose any product by comparing the prices per unit of a specific measure and not only per packaging unit. It consists in generally indicating the price per ounce or per unit in the case of multiple packaging. It is thus easier to choose the most economic size.

[*English*]

I certainly hope when this matter comes before the committee representatives of the *Fédération des Magasins Co-op* will have an opportunity of coming here and discussing this matter with the minister and members of the committee. It seems to me that omitting unit pricing from the packaging and labelling bill will mean that consumers today will not discover very easily which product is cheaper. In fact they will not be able to discover this without a computing device of some type. Moreover it is all too easy for manufacturers to disguise the effects of inflation by putting just a little less of the product in the package and leaving the price unchanged.