

Food and Drugs Act

Mr. Vic Althouse (Humboldt—Lake Centre): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak briefly on this Bill as my Party's representative on food and drug matters. I suppose had he been able to be with us tonight, our spokesperson for consumer and corporate affairs would have led off the debate.

We see this Bill as a tightening up of the legislation governing the labelling and production of food additives. We think it could be quite useful to the manufacturers of food products to protect them from the kind of additives which might not be permitted in Canada but which may be imported from other countries or, as the Bill says, from other provinces. It gives the federal Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs the kind of power it feels it needs to monitor shipments of food from one jurisdiction to the other, whether it be a country or a province, with the objective of taking samples of the food to be tested to find out whether the additives used in that food or beverage meet the standards of Canadian law.

As the Minister pointed out, this came about because of a bit of a jurisdictional argument regarding Labatt's so-called light beer. The result, after it went to the Supreme Court, was that the old Food and Drugs Act was ruled to be inadequate for the kind of monitoring the federal Government felt it had to do. These amendments are an attempt to clarify that and tighten up the law. We think this rather short Bill should go to committee to permit the food industry importers and manufacturers of food products an opportunity to assess the proposal and see whether this meets their requirements as well as those of Canadian consumers.

Mr. John R. Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate the Government for having brought forward this Bill. Quite frankly, I think the Liberals screwed the whole situation up by allowing this matter to go to the courts. What the Government is doing now is cleaning up a mess the previous Liberal Government had created.

Mr. Epp (Provencher): We are doing it for all the beer drinkers.

Mr. Rodriguez: I am a light beer drinker and when any Government starts tampering with the percentage I get very, very—

Mr. Epp (Provencher): I am not.

Mr. Rodriguez: I know that the town of which the Minister was a councillor is still dry. It is only appropriate that he should be bringing forward this Bill tonight.

Mr. Althouse: No axe to grind.

Mr. Rodriguez: No one can accuse him of a conflict of interest. Far, far from it.

I want to congratulate the Government for clearing this matter up. I particularly like Clause 6.1(1) which says:

The Governor in Council may, by regulation, identify a standard or any portion of a standard prescribed for a food as being necessary to prevent injury to the health of the consumer or purchaser of the food.

In the past we have been notoriously lax on this question of food additives. I remember when red dye used to be inserted into meat to make it appear more red to the consumer. That clause gives me a lot of confidence that we now have someone in charge at the switch who can make decisions consistent with the health of the purchaser of the food.

I have another concern which this Bill does not cover. As the Minister is in a mood to listen to representations on the question of beer and alcohol, I understand there are certain beers we cannot get in Ontario.

Mr. Epp (Provencher): Ontario liquor laws.

Mr. Rodriguez: The Minister says it is the Ontario liquor laws. I want to send him a clear message. He should sit down with his counterparts in the Ontario Government and try to clear up some of these problems. We are talking about free trade with the U.S. and we do not have free trade in this country between provinces. I go to Nova Scotia and like to drink Moosehead beer. Yet in Ontario we cannot get it. That points up a problem with respect to free trade in Canada. We have barriers to free trade between the provinces. Since the Minister cleared up this mess which the Liberals created, maybe he ought to go and look at what can be done to alleviate the problem with respect to the free movement of food in Canada.

I remember another problem where McDonald's could not bring in hamburger buns from western Canada. They ended up buying American buns because they could not bring Canadian buns across provincial borders. I am using this opportunity because these are things the Government and the Minister should be aware of.

Mr. Kaplan: Point of order, Madam Speaker. Normally I would not intervene but there are only 20 minutes left and I wonder if the Hon. Member, while he is telling us about the NDP perspective on hamburgers, realizes there are other Bills we were hoping to get to before eight o'clock this evening.

● (1940)

Mr. Murphy: I rise on the same point of order, Madam Speaker. In response to the concern of the Member of the Liberal caucus, it is certainly our intention—

Mr. Prud'homme: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Did I hear the hon. gentleman say "the chairman of the Liberal caucus"?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): Order. The Hon. Member for Churchill (Mr. Murphy) has the floor.