

• (3:20 p.m.)

SUPPLY

The house in committee of supply, Mr. Batten in the chair.

The Chairman: Order. House again in committee of supply on supplementary estimates (C), 1967-68. We will now consider the estimates of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. These estimates were last considered on March 19.

DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS

1c. Departmental administration, \$399,53.

Mr. Douglas: Mr. Chairman, I want to say just a few words on the estimates of this department, particularly with respect to Bill C-190 which was the result of some two years of investigation by a committee of this house which looked into the price of drugs and found that drug prices in Canada were higher than in almost any other country in the western world. As a result of that committee's work a number of recommendations were made to the government, two of which have been acted upon.

The first recommendation had to do with the removal of the sales tax on prescription drugs, and the government implemented that recommendation. The result was that there was some reduction in the price of prescription drugs across Canada. Since that time, however, the drug companies have announced very substantial increases which have more than wiped out the reduction occasioned by the government's removal of the sales tax. Therefore the position of the consumer today is actually worse, and not better, since the drug bill came before the house.

I received from a businessman in the province of Ontario a copy of a bill which he received for \$51.60 for 60 capsules. This man was required by his doctor to take 4 capsules a day, which means that he has to pay \$3.44 a day for the drug. Since he will probably be required to take it for a considerable length of time, one can see what a heavy burden this is for him.

When the businessman complained to his druggist, who was a friend of his, about this very exorbitant price, the druggist said, "I know it is very high but the"—particular drug company, which he named—"has a monopoly by virtue of its patent, and there is nothing we can do about it". Apparently this drug is cheaper in the United States, in Great Britain and elsewhere and, according to the

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druggist, this is the price which he must charge. One could duplicate this example again and again. The fact is that in spite of the government's action to remove the sales tax on prescription drugs, the Canadian public is still paying exorbitant prices for products which are not luxuries, which are not optional, but which they must have if they are seriously ill.

The second recommendation upon which the government acted was to make certain changes in the Patent Act and Trade Marks Act. These changes were brought before the house in the form of Bill C-190. We had an excellent debate in the house on this matter. The bill was given second reading, which as hon. members know means approval in principle, and we in this party were very anxious that the house should not recess until that bill had passed, been sent to the other place, and then been placed on the statute books. We have not been able to persuade the government to proceed with the legislation, and various explanations were given to us. Sometimes we were told that the reason the bill could not be proceeded with was that the official opposition, the members of the Conservative party, were going to put on a protracted debate.

Mr. Pugh: That is ridiculous.

Mr. Douglas: I think the government could have called the bill and found out whether or not that was true. On the other hand I find that members of the official opposition have been told that there were important amendments which had not been drafted, and therefore the bill could not be proceeded with. But I draw the attention of the committee to the statement made by the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs on March 19 at page 7815 of *Hansard*, where he said:

In light of the suggestions that were made by the official opposition we reviewed the bill. We have come forth with what we think are additional clarifications that in our opinion re-ensure the safety measures of the bill. I am prepared, of course, to stand by the bill in terms of its economic significance and in terms of the safety of the Canadian people, and I am prepared to have it debated at any time.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, it seems to me that the minister who is in charge of the bill and who ought to know whether or not these amendments are ready for consideration by committee of the whole has made it abundantly clear that as far as he is concerned he has discharged his responsibility, that he has the amendments ready, and that it is not his