

*Government Organization*

to the protected U.S.A. price is roughly 10 cents (and Canada has the same level due to the fact that the oil market is controlled by and geared to the U.S.A. market). Multiplying these 10 cents per gallon with the Canadian motor gasoline volume (not counting aviation gasoline) of approximately five billion gallons per year gives the staggering overpricing of the Canadian customer in the range of \$500 million per year. The only way to bring that figure down is restoring competition in the Canadian oil industry by exposing it without any protection to the world market.

He goes on to quote prices and other statistical details. Then he says:

The assumed reason for setting the price of imported motor gasoline at 10.5 or 12.5 cents per gallon was according to the order in council for an import at fair market values "that it affected the interests of Canadian producers or manufacturers prejudicially or injuriously".

In other words, the interests of Canadian producers or manufacturers were taken into consideration, according to what this gentleman writes in his letter, rather than the interests of the Canadian consumer. I am not prepared to say whether the national oil policy that we have in Canada is good or bad for Canada generally; I just do not know. But I do think that if there had been a cabinet minister responsible to consumers and concerned about the interests of consumers, the results might have been different.

They are very serious charges that are made in this letter to the minister. They have not been answered. I understand that these charges are provable and that the man involved is quite prepared to back them up in any way that he is asked. It may be that \$500 million out of the consumers' pocket is the price we have to pay for national identity; but if this is so, the consumer should know and it should be his or her decision to make, rather than the decision of others acting in what they think is the best interests of the consumer. When we talk about tariff policies in Canada, when we talk about import duties in Canada, the voice of the consumer should be heard as a countervailing force against the other interests that call for these considerations.

I hope the government will seriously consider the suggestions we have made with respect to establishing a department of consumer affairs, with a minister responsible to parliament and the Canadian people for the operation of the department. Like many other things, this will also come to pass. I only hope that it will not go to the last minute and we do not become involved in cliff-hanging decisions. This is a propitious time, when the

[Mr. Saltsman.]

legislation in respect of government reorganization is being dealt with, to deal with this suggestion also. We are not asking for full-blown powers, research projects and disclosure projects immediately. We are asking that a start be made, that this responsibility be assumed, that the importance of the role of the consumer in our society and the importance of the right of the consumer to be heard in the cabinet council be recognized.

**Mr. Fawcett:** Mr. Chairman, I welcome the opportunity of saying a few words—and I will be very brief, as I usually am—in support of the amendment proposed by my colleague the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway. I am gravely concerned, as are many hon. members, about the fact that there does not appear to be any department whose authority it is to investigate and take the necessary action to protect the rights of the consumer. But if I am mistaken and some department has been delegated such authority, I can only say that it has been entirely remiss in its duties. However, taking into account the very obvious fact that the consumers' interests have been so completely neglected, I feel it is substantially correct to say that there is not at the present time any government authority established which is designed to take the long overdue steps necessary to protect the consumer from misleading and exaggerated advertising, unrealistic costs of financing—which in some cases is out and out robbery—deceptive packaging, inferior quality goods and all the gimmicks now being used to influence and dupe consumers into thinking that they are getting something for nothing, while in reality they are paying exorbitant prices for necessary goods, mainly because of such expensive and exaggerated advertising as well as the outlandish gimmicks to which I have referred.

May I submit, Mr. Chairman, that the prevalent rash of strikes which are seriously affecting our economy, the very alarming increase in cases of mental illness and the general feeling of unrest that appears to prevail, are all directly related to the insecurity and frustrations of people who find they have become entangled in a situation over which they have no control and over which no government department seems to have any jurisdiction.

● (7:20 p.m.)

May I further submit, Mr. Chairman, that the incidence of strikes, legal or illegal, will continue as long as our citizens are compelled to remain in this area of ever spiralling prices,