

Measure to Restrain Tobacco Use

[English]

Mr. William Knowles (Norfolk-Haldimand): Mr. Speaker, I rise to take part in the debate on Bill C-10 introduced by the hon. member for Surrey-White Rock (Mr. Mather). If I did not take part in the debate I would be remiss in my duty to the tobacco growing area of Norfolk county as well as many other counties in Ontario including Your Honour's constituency in Northumberland and Durham counties. Your Honour knows as well as I do the great impact which that industry has not only on those who produce tobacco but on many other sectors of the economy.

The production and sale of tobacco is of number one importance. Therefore, one can understand why tobacco producers get uptight whenever they hear something is going to affect the production and sale of a legitimate product. We also get uptight when we hear unreasonable attacks on this legitimate product of ours.

• (1630)

Having said this, I want to commend the sponsor of this bill, the hon. member for Surrey-White Rock. As he has told us, the bill is divided into two parts, one of which has to do with the control of tobacco products to young people. I do not think anyone in Canada, and certainly no tobacco producer, wants to encourage young people to take up the habit of smoking tobacco. But I am doubtful whether the proposition before us is the proper way of achieving such an end.

Young people are well able to appreciate logic and good reasoning when it is presented to them, and it seems to me that an educational program advising young people against consuming tobacco in amounts which might be harmful to them would be a more effective approach. As to the difficulty surrounding an attempt to do these things by legislation, I can only remind hon. members of the experience in the United States years ago when an effort was made to prevent the sale of liquor through the famous prohibition laws. Everyone knows what an utter failure that was.

It is part two of the bill which really concerns tobacco producers. First, as to the indication that tobacco advertising is to be regulated, it has now been shown that this procedure is useless in terms of restricting the smoking of tobacco. On January 1 legislation took effect in the United States banning cigarette advertising on radio and television. Nevertheless, as shown by figures at the end of the first quarter, consumption of cigarettes in the United States has continued to increase. The daily newspapers last week carried news items which made it clear that the only result was a negative one, a loss of revenue to the radio and television industry. So limiting advertising is not the answer. Again, I believe a program of education is needed.

What hurts and puzzles us as much as anything is the power which it is proposed be given to the Crown to test, analyse and regulate the tar and nicotine content of tobacco. We as farmers and producers are unable to control these levels except by a long process of plant breeding designed to produce tobacco with low tar and nicotine content. Suppose this were achieved: we would then have tampered with the aroma and flavour of the product and

nobody would want to use it. This would be dangerous to the continuance of our export trade to Europe and particularly to the United Kingdom where people are very conscious of these qualities. A significant change in this respect might well lose us the sale of our product.

In connection with the proposition that the government be given power to control or ban advertising, I am surprised the hon. member did not read more closely the advertising code agreed upon by the Tobacco Manufacturers' Council and effective January 1 of this year. This would bring about, by voluntary action, the very results which the legislation has in mind. I shall not read the code in its entirety but I should like to quote a few of the rules which have been adopted:

1. There will be no cigarette advertising after December 31, 1971, on radio and television.
2. All cigarette packages produced after April 1, 1972, shall bear, clearly and prominently displayed on one side thereof, the following words: "Warning: Excessive smoking may be hazardous to your health"—"avis: Fumer à l'excès peut nuire à votre santé".
3. After April 1, 1972, labels carrying the warning noted in paragraph 2 shall be made available to operators of cigarette vending machines.
4. Average tar and nicotine content of cigarette smoke from any brand of cigarettes shall not exceed 22 milligrams of tar, moisture free weight, per cigarette, and 1.6 milligrams of nicotine per cigarette.

These people, knowing the effect of tar and nicotine, have fixed levels which we can accept, levels we can live with and beyond which it would be dangerous for them to go. There are 14 rules in all. It is far better, it seems to me, for an industry which is willing to police itself to be allowed to do so rather than to impose legislation upon it directed to the same end. After all, the proposals before us certainly include an infringement of the freedom to advertise and tell the story of a legitimate commercial product: this is sometimes described as "the right to sell, the right to tell." It might also be considered an infringement of free speech.

I therefore maintain that to interfere with free advertising practices in such circumstances would be exceeding the scope of good legislation. After all, consumers are knowledgeable people and have sufficient good taste to appreciate when advertising is unsuitable or unacceptable: if they feel that an advertiser goes too far, he will suffer loss in the marketplace. It is up to producers to control themselves in this area.

As a tobacco farmer, I should also like to fault this legislation on several other grounds. First, we in the industry are deeply concerned that so much of the thrust of this legislation should be based upon statistical evidence that smoking is a dangerous health hazard in Canada. We do not agree with this. We agree that there is statistical evidence to this effect, but it is only statistical evidence and statistics are shaky ground upon which to go as far as this legislation seeks to go.

Not only are the statistics questionable, but the way in which the statistics are gathered is open to question. During the hearing of evidence in the committee on health and welfare having to do with smoking and health, a statistician appeared before the committee and testified that before one could really reach any conclusion from