

• (5:00 p.m.)

As I said, this bill has been introduced because of urgent letters I received from my constituents and people outside my riding, many of them suffering from allergies. The provisions of the bill have some connection with allergies since they deal with a matter that has become of increasing public concern. People have the right to know what is going into their stomachs, onto their faces, as well as what kind of products they are paying for. Very little has been done in this country to inform the public in this way. If anything, the attitude of many of our manufacturers and promotion-minded men is that the members of the public should be treated like children. The prevalent thinking is, "Do not tell them anything you do not have to. The less members of the public know the better it will be for them." I do not think that is so. I think members of the public want to be informed about the contents of products and will insist on knowing.

We have made some progress in this country by introducing legislation that calls for specific types of labelling for various products. Also, certain products must meet certain standards. Although the standards set by the Department of National Health and Welfare are valuable in that they protect us in general against injurious ingredients, they do not provide the protection that sufferers from allergies in particular need. For instance, the ingredients of certain products may be perfectly harmless for those who do not suffer from allergies but yet may be absolutely devastating for those who do. Setting standards that food products must meet is not enough. We must go farther.

The public has become aware of injurious substances in products other than food. The house has referred bills to do with tobacco and tobacco advertising to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs. That committee will be asked to recommend that information about the effects of tobacco be printed on cigarette packages. We have begun publicizing the nicotine and tar contents of various brands of cigarettes on the principle that the public ought to know. After all, members of the public ought to be in a position to make decisions about health.

The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs has indicated that legislation will be introduced in the house dealing with labelling of various products, among them being toys, glue and various other products which might be injurious to the health of any group in our

Food and Drugs Act

society. We are moving in the right direction. For that reason I submit that the bill before the house is particularly apt, being aimed at the specific problems confronting sufferers from allergies, as well as the general principle that the public ought to have in its possession all relevant information about products it buys.

Some hon. members have suggested that the costs incurred in printing new labels giving product ingredients would outweigh the advantages of printing such labels. I submit that the extra costs are not that great. I am not advocating an overnight change-over of labels. I understand that companies have substantial investments in present set-ups and it is unfair to expect them to change their labels immediately. If passed the legislation will allow a reasonable period for manufacturers to bring out new labels. It makes little difference whether or not the ingredients of a product are included on a label. We are talking here about a few extra words which could be inserted when the label is printed, and I do not see how that would increase the cost of labels significantly. On the other hand, the suffering of many people will be alleviated as a result of new labels giving the ingredients of products, and these advantages will far outweigh any minor costs the manufacturers may incur.

Another advantage stemming from having labels identifying ingredients of products will be that we shall get rid of some of the mysterious nonsense surrounding many of our products. I am referring to so-called secret ingredients, to tigers that pop out of boxes and esoteric mysteries of certain products that in fact may contain some fundamental and pedestrian chemicals. All such ingredients should be made known. If the highly advertised product that is selling simply because of its advertising build-up can be undersold by an equivalent product, it ought to be undersold. Surely the public has the right to compare products. At the moment it cannot because it has no way of comparing the various ingredients of similar products. Of course, there will always be distinctions that cannot be listed—distinctions of taste and of quality which cannot be defined as well as distinctions resulting from promotion.

I do not expect that a piece of legislation such as I am proposing here will solve all difficulties associated with consumer knowledge of products. Nevertheless, acceptance of the principle that consumers ought to know will be a big step forward in assisting the public to obtain the information vital to it.