

*Food and Drugs Act*

to make life a little better for these victims than might otherwise have been the case.

I suggest that when we are talking about financial aid to assist the victims of thalidomide we should think not only of the babies themselves and of the years ahead of them to childhood and adulthood, but we must also think of what this has done to the parents in some cases. I have here amongst the papers on my desk—but I do not intend to pick it up or refer to it because I do not want to give the name—a letter from the father of a thalidomide baby. In the letter, the whole tragedy is spelled out. The letter reaches the point where the father tells me that on such a date the baby died. The next sentence says, "I am now fighting for my wife's sanity."

The point I make, Mr. Speaker, is that financial assistance may be necessary not only for the children themselves but for the parents and families who have been through this tragic experience. As I say, I hope that at some point in this debate we will get a statement on what has been done in this field. I am sure that all Canadians will want the government, in the name of the Canadian people, to assume its full responsibility for these people.

I had one letter from a person who saw a press report of something I had said about this matter and expressed concern about asking the government to pay the extra costs for these thalidomide babies. This particular correspondent said to me, "I don't mind your taking this stand if you want to but I wish instead of saying the government should pay this extra cost you would say the taxpayer should pay it so it will be clear that is what you are asking for". On that basis this particular correspondent said, "I don't think I should be asked to pay for the mistakes or negligence of the government." Like other members in this house, I try my best to win a case with a correspondent, even if he disagrees with me. I took the liberty of writing back to this correspondent and commenting on his point of view. I said to him something to this effect: Some tragedy could befall you or some member of your family and if you had to pay for it yourself it could result in your having to mortgage your entire future. I pointed out that if that tragedy or that mistake were in any sense the responsibility of the government, we could all, including me, pay for it as taxpayers, probably for a few cents each, and that I would rather it be done that way.

Well, we do not always win arguments with our correspondents quite so readily as I seemed to do in this case. At any rate, this gentleman who had opposed my stand in the first place that federal money should be used

for this purpose wrote back to say he did now agree. I cite that case just to support my contention that I believe Canadians from coast to coast will support any expenditures that are necessary out of public funds, whether federal or provincial, to see to it that these victims, the children themselves, their parents or families, are assisted in coping with the results of this tragedy in the best way that is possible.

Despite the onus that I have deliberately placed upon the government, Mr. Speaker, for what has happened, despite my insistence that public funds, federal or provincial, should be made available so far as necessary, I think we must also recognize the responsibility of the drug companies in a tragedy such as this. The minister, in the document that he had his department prepare for the thalidomide conference that was held in August, does spell out the efforts of the drug company at one point to get permission to have this drug marketed, even when the drug directorate was going slowly on it. The whole point that the minister makes is that there is a responsibility on the drug companies as well as on the government. In this respect, I agree with the minister. I think this is one of the reasons that this bill should go to a standing or special committee, so that we could have representatives of these drug companies before the committee, not only to give us information and advice for our assistance in deciding whether or not this bill goes far enough, but so that we could question the representatives of drug companies as to their part and their performance in this whole story. In fact, I think it will add up to a clear realization that they should put up substantial sums of money to help the people who are victims of this mistake.

As a matter of fact, the whole question of the profits the drug companies made out of marketing these hundreds of new drugs every year, out of the gullibility of the public as the minister said for a pill to deal with any ailment, is something which I feel calls for a very thorough study. If I thought that the report of the restrictive trade practices commission on the inquiry conducted by that commission would cover this whole question, one could of course wait for that. However, I suspect that is not the case, that that report will be more in line with the terms of the Combines Investigation Act. In other words, it will be more on the question of whether or not there is a combination amongst the drug companies to fix prices. I think we should be inquiring as to the practices, procedures and motives in bringing new drugs on to the market. We should be inquiring into the profits that are made out of standard