

Tire Safety Act

I hope that, in addition to allaying the fears of hon. members who have already spoken, the government will take this legislation very seriously, because aside from the odd case of tire defects being responsible for specific accidents it is my view that the overloading of tires per se by individual motor operators is the cause of many more accidents than we care to believe. As I say, leaving aside the question of obvious defects in the course of mass tire manufacture, it is my view that at least 35 per cent of the Canadian driving public are overloading their tires, and no amount of sophisticated investigation can tell the minister or the House to what extent overloaded tires are responsible directly or indirectly for motor vehicle accidents.

The overloading of cars on weekends or, for that matter, on any day of the week is a serious factor bearing on highway deaths and injuries, so anything the government can do to enforce the regulations in relation to this bill will play only a part in reducing what I call the worldwide epidemic of highway fatalities.

I realize we are verging upon a philosophical debate here when we talk about consumer protection. Do I have the right, when I go to a tire dealer, to look for a bargain? Certainly, I want to get the best possible tire at the best possible price. But we have to look at this very carefully. There are those who say we do not have the right to interfere with the free market; that a man should be able to buy whatever tire he chooses to put on his car. I can understand that point of view, but to my mind the only right I have when I go to buy a tire is to buy the safest tire for my car that modern technology can produce. I do not have the right, on a Friday night, because I can get a monetary bargain at a tire shop, to go out the next day and wipe out a whole family travelling to the country simply because I have saved a few dollars by putting cheap tires on my car.

We need to be clear about the rights of the individual in terms of what he can or cannot do when he goes shopping for a tire. I am not suggesting the minister should build up a bureaucracy, nor am I suggesting, as was done by the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. McKenzie), that because the recording system failed in the United States it will fail in Canada. I am getting a little tired of that way of thinking. Our system does not necessarily have to be the same as the system used in the United States.

I believe the minister is willing to take a good initiative. I know all about the lobbying and the bureaucratic mess in the United States; I have been in touch with Mr. Nader on many occasions and I know in detail why the system failed in the United States. But there is no reason why it should fail in Canada. I have faith in the minister and his philosophy. Modern-day consumerism does not necessarily mean interfering in the marketplace. I believe that government, the public and the manufacturers have to work together, and if we do this in a sensible and adult way, goods can be produced at a reasonable price while yet being of a quality which ensures the protection of the individual.

I think we can find reasonably priced tires in the marketplace and at the same time be sure that they are the best tires that modern technology can produce. The public has a right to expect no less, whether the tires in question are new tires or replacement tires. With a minimum of expense and a maximum amount of modern-day surveil-

lance, we can make sure that the individual buyer gets a good deal and the public gets the protection it deserves.

● (1530)

At the risk of being repetitive, while the minister quoted a specific coroner's report it is impossible to be specific about the number of death and injury-producing accidents that have occurred because the wrong tires were on a vehicle. In terms of manoeuvrability and handling, in terms of fatigue on a long journey, it is essential that a driver has the right tires on a vehicle. I think the minister will agree that no amount of specific investigation by a coroner would disclose that the tires were defective and caused an accident because one blew out, or something of that nature. In my view, the fact that the driver did not have the right tire on his vehicle during a long trip is a definite factor in the cause of a death or injury-producing accident.

Therefore, I commend the government for introducing this legislation and I hope the public and the industry will co-operate in playing some small part in reducing the worldwide epidemic of slaughter on our highways.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I want to say only a few words on this bill. I want to echo the remarks of the previous speaker in saying we welcome the legislation, which provides some better standards in the area of safety, particularly of automobile tires. The legislation deserves the support of all.

May I say to the minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, that if the minimum safety requirements and safety marking of tires results in reducing the multiplicity of sizes and qualities of tires with which the consumer is presently faced, then we will have accomplished a good deal. While I agree with many of the remarks of the hon. member for Brome-Missisquoi (Mr. Grafftey), one thing I am sure he appreciates as well as the minister is that when Joe Consumer goes into a tire store and he is faced with a multiplicity of makes, sizes and qualities, he is thoroughly confused and does not know what he is buying.

Further, I hope the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) and the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Ouellet) will work very closely together in the area of false and misleading advertising of tires. If you were to believe all the ads you see in the newspapers, Mr. Speaker, you would be able to buy the best tire in the world for almost nothing. The consumer is being harassed or confused in two ways: first, by the multiplicity of sizes, qualities, makes and names of tires; secondly, by the kind of advertising of these tires presented to him.

Another matter that the Minister of Transport and the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs should look into relates to what are called standard tires. If a person makes the mistake of forgetting about the quality of the tires on a brand new car, he will automatically get tires on his car that are in fact unsafe and unreliable. The last time I ordered a car, Mr. Speaker, I ordered it with Oshawa delivery. It was a compact car and I picked it up in Oshawa. I had forgotten about the tires. The tires on my car were called standard tires, 4-ply, and then in brackets "2-ply rating". If you can get 15,000 to 18,000 miles out of