

Food and Drugs Act

they have had in their constituencies and, by doing that, highlight the importance and seriousness of this matter.

It is important that we get together with officials of the Department of National Health and Welfare, and the people in the industry, of course, to see how we can, in practical terms, work this matter through. The Hon. Member for Hamilton East in drafting the legislation, has left it open for amendment. I think that is good. It is a wise move on her part. In fact, she said in the House today that she looked forward to officials from the Department of National Health and Welfare and others contributing to this Bill and putting in place amendments and regulations that will make it work in a proper and effective way. We should move to expedite this Bill through the debate process and pass it along to committee so it can be put in place at the earliest possible date.

We should hear from officials of the Department of National Health and Welfare and officials from the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs as to the progress they have made. We should hear their recommendations and the results of their discussions with the food industry. We know that has been going on for sometime. It is useful to have this debate so that this subject that is so serious can be brought home to those who have concerns about food additives. Let us resolve to move this matter to committee when it next comes before this House for debate.

Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak in support of the Bill of my colleague, the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps), Bill C-289. It is a Bill that has just recently been introduced into the House of Commons. Bill C-289, an Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act, is really more than a Bill which will amend the Food and Drugs Act. This Bill is a reflection of very serious concerns of parents and other members of our society who live in constant worry about the contents of the food they are about to eat when they are out in restaurants.

It is very interesting statistically to note that in 1968, as an example, the Canadian Restaurant and Food Services Association told us that 18 per cent of all people in Canada eat meals outside of their home. Here we are in 1988, just under 20 years later, and more than 36 per cent of the population eat one out of three meals outside of their homes. I think that is a reflection of the changing dynamics of the society in which we live. We have working families and more access to fast-food chains.

It is part and parcel of daily life to go to get a hamburger at Wendy's or whatever happens to be the fast food chain in the area. It is fun to go out on Sunday with one's children and have a bite to eat. But if you happen to be the parent of a child or a teenager who has a severe allergy, you are taking their lives in your hands, not because you are not a responsible human being, when you in all good faith sit down and partake of a meal and there are serious consequences. If the question is asked, for example, if there are any nuts in a particular food, or is there a particular kind of mayonnaise which contains eggs

in this food, and there is not a clear and unequivocal answer, or a knowledgeable answer, you have taken your life in your hands if you eat it and are allergic to it.

Members in the House today have talked about the sad case of a young man whom I gather is from the riding of the Hon. Member who just spoke. This young man was allergic to nuts and died at the very early age of 17 years. What a tragedy that was. He had eaten packaged apple turnovers at other restaurants without harm, but this particular restaurant made their apple turnovers—and I am sure they would be quite delicious if you were not allergic to them—with hazelnuts. The unfortunate aspect is that here was another mother who was convinced these were fine, edible and safe for her youngster. Had he been alone or with a group of friends, he probably would have felt it was perfectly acceptable to eat the apple turnover because he had eaten them before and there was no problem.

My colleague has recommended a Private Member's Bill that would enable better information, increased food ingredient information, available to Canadians who eat in restaurants. I think it is absolutely key that where possible we, as parliamentarians, bring this problem to the considered attention of Ministers of this House so they can enact the kind of legislation which can prevent unnecessary deaths or sickness in our society. The Hon. Member for Vancouver East (Ms. Mitchell) pointed out that one could suffer from severe migraine headaches from eating certain kinds of foods.

I think what is important is the provision for the kind of information which will enable people to help themselves, and we can go about listing that kind of information in a place that would be easily accessible and readily understood. I was quite pleased to hear that the Allergy Information Association has given some very concrete suggestions. It is one of the many health groups which have supported this action to amend the Food and Drugs Act, as well as others, including the St. John's Ambulance, Burlington Branch, the Washington Centre for Science in Public Institutions, and the Consumer Association of Canada, which has recently joined in support of this very important move to enable a change to the Food and Drugs Act.

Thirty-five municipalities, counties, towns and cities have passed resolutions in favour of the restaurant food labelling, and these are Government supported initiatives. After all, municipalities are part of the government structure of the country in which we live.

Eleven school boards of education have passed similar resolutions. We have received dozens and dozens of telegrams. The Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) received in excess of 4,800 letters from May 1, 1987 to May 1, 1988, from Canadians calling for food labelling. My colleague, the Hon. Member for Hamilton East, has received over 100 letters in response to her new Bill. We have had a total of 11,000 petitions, with signatures, collected. This indicates that the population is seriously concerned about what is going on. This is an expression of the will of the population to ask us to