

suggest to the minister that this is one area in which he could do something.

The legislation establishing the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs did not give the minister sufficient power under which he could act. The main purpose of the department, therefore, is to inform, to educate and to protect the consumer in the marketplace. Since the formation of this department I have not seen any literature or any programs on radio or television informing me as to its aim and powers. After all, I am also an amateur in the marketplace. I have been hoodwinked on numerous occasions and probably I will be hoodwinked again tomorrow or in my next venture into the jungle. The minister has not seen fit to educate me or any of the 20 million people in Canada.

I realize that the department has only been operating for four or five months and it is probably not right to condemn the minister at this early stage, but the people of Canada were quite happy when such a young and vigorous minister took over this portfolio and they had hoped they were going to see action and that the feathers would fly. However, so far I have been quite disappointed in that I have not seen anyone get plucked by the minister. He is a quite young, affable and vigorous person and he occupies a very sensitive position in the cabinet. His position is probably the most sensitive in the whole of Canada in that, if he wishes to do his job properly, he will have to intervene between the consumer and the business community. As a person occupying such a sensitive position he must be extremely careful not to become obligated to the business community because if it becomes necessary for him to react to any of their financial decisions he must be under no obligation to them and be free to act.

● (4:10 p.m.)

I am very doubtful, therefore, about the propriety of the minister accepting free transportation from a rubber company during his campaign for the leadership of the Liberal party. The time may come when he may have to intercede on behalf of the people against this company. I believe that by accepting this type of gift he is obligated to a certain degree and may be inhibited from acting in a completely unbiased manner. I urge the minister and the other ministers involved in the leadership campaign not to become entangled in obligations to various business enterprises. I am very reluctant to see ministers beholden to any of these major enterprises.

27053—491½

*Supply—Consumer and Corporate Affairs*

As proof positive of the fact the cost of living is continuing to rise I cite the recent report of the Batten commission which was authorized by the three prairie province governments to investigate grocery prices on the prairies. The commission revealed some startling figures concerning the degree to which two companies have gained control of the grocery business on the prairies. There is no doubt in my mind that if this condition exists on the prairies it exists in Ontario, Quebec and the rest of Canada. When the minister was asked if he would take action on the report and extend this type of investigation to the rest of Canada he was not too excited about doing so. He seemed to feel that if some other province wished to undertake an investigation he would be glad to receive the report.

This is another area of the responsibility of this department which I do not understand. Is it the responsibility of the minister to institute investigations into various prices? I suggest it is the responsibility of the department not only to receive reports from other commissions set up by other agencies but also, when it becomes aware of situations in Canada, to undertake investigations itself. If a monopoly situation is revealed, proper legal action should then be taken under another branch of this department to see that these people are properly brought into line.

I realize, of course, that the anti-combines legislation is not very effective. As was pointed out by one of my colleagues the other day, even though dozens and dozens of corporations have been convicted of price fixing, not one director of these various companies has ever been sent to jail. If these people are convicted they should not be allowed to escape the full penalty of the law, even though I am not one to advocate filling our jails with people because in most cases this serves a very limited purpose. However, I do know that people who have no financial means are suffering in our jails. The fact is that the directors and officers of major corporations can extract from the community hundreds of millions of dollars through illegal price fixing and never have to feel the full force of the law and languish in our jails. If the people of Canada saw such individuals brought to justice in a few instances they would have more faith in this department and more faith in the government.

Consumer credit is another field in which the minister would have the right to intercede. The consumer spends a large portion of