

Broadcasting Act

trols operated by the industry itself. I think it is necessary to make these regulations part of the law of the land.

I do not wish to be rash or arbitrary in imposing an unfair burden on business or advertising or the networks. All I am suggesting is that the codes which they themselves have provided be incorporated in the law. Surely this is not too much to ask. Further, I suggest that this bill be referred to one of the standing committees of the House, the committee on broadcasting, the committee on health, welfare and social affairs or the committee which usually handles consumer affairs questions.

It might be more realistic to suggest that the government make the appropriate reference. The committee would then have an opportunity to hear witnesses from consumer groups, from the industry, advertising agencies, government and the broadcasting networks. It would be able to evaluate the evidence and propose to the government a specific set of regulations to be included in the Broadcasting Act. With all these different sectors of society represented and placing their points of view before the committee, we could surely work toward an effective solution. I think it is important we should do so and that we should take the initiative in this regard, because I believe there is a serious crisis facing us in this area. After all, what could be more important than the welfare of our children?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mrs. Grace MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad to be able to rise in my place today and support the resolution in the name of the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath). This matter is of far more general concern than most people realize. It goes back a long way. I am sorry the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Basford) is not able to be here today. We understood he would be here in order to listen to this side of the story.

When he and I were members of the joint committee of the Commons and the Senate which investigated prices a few years ago we had a great deal of work to do in connection with advertising, and the subject of advertising as it affected children arose on a number of occasions. As the hon. member for St. John's East has observed, it came up in connection with such products as cereals, toys, and so on, where commercial advertisers were, to put it plainly, brainwashing babies into bludgeoning their parents into buying goods which their parents did not want to buy in many cases, or could not afford to buy. I noticed that the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs was very impressed at the time by the need for control in this direction.

• (4:20 p.m.)

The hon. member who has just spoken gave a good deal of the background behind television advertising for children. Increasingly, television is becoming a sort of built-in baby sitter in a great many homes. This is one reason why I think day centres and child-care centres are a far more acceptable alternative.

The minister seems to be preparing to settle for a voluntary code such as that put forward by the Canadian Association of Broadcasters. While voluntary efforts

made by certain organizations to police themselves might be useful, we are becoming more and more aware that where self-interest is involved voluntary policing does not do a satisfactory job. Even the minister has been driven to that conclusion. Earlier this year he brought in a bill dealing with packaging and labelling and there were very loud cries from merchandising interests that they were perfectly well able to police their own industry in this regard. But the minister had reached a position where he realized that that sort of policing had some very wide loopholes and left a great deal to be desired; consequently he brought in his packaging and labelling bill.

Almost every piece of legislation that the minister has brought in has evoked shrieks of anguish from some commercial interests. Nevertheless, the minister proceeded with the legislation because he had been persuaded that, while voluntary codes might be useful to a certain extent, they are not satisfactory from the standpoint of the consumer.

There are some rather odd situations in connection with the labelling of textiles. The minister has introduced a bill to make the labelling of the fibre content of textiles compulsory, but he did not go further than the voluntary code in the matter of care labelling. In other words, although labelling of the fibre content was made compulsory, once the fabric has been purchased women are on their own in regard to washing it, ironing it, dry cleaning it, and so on. I am convinced that within a year or so the minister will be forced to take the second step and make care labelling compulsory. Certainly I am getting many complaints about inadequate care labelling under the present voluntary code.

An examination of the code issued by the Canadian Association of Broadcasters reveals cause for discontent. It does not propose to do away with commercial advertising on children's programs. It provides that advertisements should respect the power of a child's imagination and should not exaggerate service, product or premium characteristics or stimulate unreasonable expectations by children of their performance. Just what is meant by "exaggerate service" and by "stimulate unreasonable expectations" on the part of children? I find those words very interesting.

It goes on to refer to "avoiding undue pressure upon parents". Just what is undue pressure? Is undue pressure having a child nag his parents in a toy store to buy some expensive toy because he has been brainwashed by a television ad to do so? The code is full of tendentious language of this sort that is very hard to pin down.

I think the minister will be forced to deal with this advertising code in the same manner as he has dealt with similar voluntary situations. He will have to recognize that groups interested in profit from merchandising cannot be trusted to enforce regulations that they make against themselves. A good example of what I mean will be seen shortly. The minister is going to introduce legislation to prohibit use of flammable material for children's clothing, since a child could be enveloped in a sheet of flame if he got too close to an open fire, a candle or something of that sort. Jequirry beans have already been withdrawn from the market since it was discovered that half a bean can take the life of a child. People say that war is too important to be left entirely to generals. I think that commercial