

*Proposed Consumers Affairs Department*

Therefore the council of the corporation of the town of Espanola urgently request that our senior governments create a select committee to investigate the reasons behind the inflationary rise in prices and that this committee be prepared to submit recommendations for controlling inflation and insuring the standard of living in Canada.

That a copy of this resolution be forwarded to all Ontario municipalities, the Canadian Labour Congress and Mayors and Reeves Association for their endorsement and ask that they strongly urge their members of parliament both federal and provincial to support this resolution.

It is signed by the mayor of the town of Espanola. This communication, Mr. Speaker, could be duplicated many, many times across Canada. That is why we are asking at this time that there be created a full department of consumers affairs with a minister in full time charge.

This government has been accused of many colourful sins of commission. However, I believe the majority of the people of Canada are far more concerned with its sins of omission. One of the gravest of those sins has been the failure of the government to devote a single department to the protection of the consumers of this country.

It is becoming increasingly evident that the consumer needs protection. We live in a society where well organized groups of manufacturers, processors and advertisers, driven by the fierce competition of the market, use all the techniques of modern processing, packaging and advertising to sell their wares to the consumer. And the consumer is fair game. Consumers are badly organized and poorly informed, are conned, gulled, deceived and robbed, and there is neither protection nor redress. In fact, conning the consumer has become the avenue to affluence for a great many business concerns today.

I must say that certain things have been done to protect the consumer. Bodies within the government exist for consumers' protection. For instance, the Department of Trade and Commerce has its division of weights and measures. The Department of Agriculture has its branch dealing with consumer information and also its meat inspection section. The Department of Fisheries has its consumer branch and also an information section. The Department of National Health and Welfare has a food and drug directorate. The Department of Justice has its anti-combines legislation. These activities scattered throughout various departments of government, Mr. Speaker, should be brought together and put under one department as we have suggested.

[Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway).]

We want to see the creation of a prices review board and a consumers' bureau where representations and complaints by consumers may be made to one department coming under one minister who, alone among the other ministers heading departments of government, will speak for the consumers of this country. At the moment they have no spokesman.

It is interesting to note in passing that in the United States at this time a New York Democrat is introducing a bill embodying exactly similar concepts to those I have outlined. In the United States government 33 agencies devoted to bits and pieces of consumer protection have grown like an under-sized Topsy. The new legislation seeks to place those agencies under one department. In the United States as in Great Britain they are far ahead of Canada in this field. President Johnson has been sending messages to Congress regarding consumer protection and the tightening up of legislation for several years now.

In Great Britain a housewives' charter was introduced earlier this year. Its passage into legislation was interrupted by the recent election over there but it will be proceeded with again. It seeks to protect the consumers. We need a consumers' bill of rights in Canada. If I were to summarize very briefly what I think those rights should be they could be brought under four headings: First, the right to safety and quality; second, the right to truthful information; third, the right to a dollar of stable purchasing power and, fourth, the right to be heard.

I will not say very much about the first right, the right to safety and quality, because in the main I think our government departments are doing fairly well in that regard. Also, information is available from voluntary associations such as the Consumers Association of Canada. We have not too many complaints regarding such things as safe toys for children, inflammable goods and so on. However, we are concerned about the second right.

• (5:10 p.m.)

First, we need more truthful packaging. We have already dealt in this house with the bacon striptease where the manufacturers proved very prudish indeed when it came to letting enough of the bacon be seen for the housewife to tell whether she was buying meat or fat. I believe we have now reached the bikini stage but there is still something to be desired.