

Corporate and Consumer Affairs

of 21 brands of various kinds of milk and fruit juices in wax cartons were purchased at random across the city. Using standard measures from the Department of Trade and Commerce, and watched by an official of the Weights and Measures division of that department, C.A.C. members measured the contents of these cartons. Thirteen of the 21 brands contained less than the amount of contents stated on the package, several brands being four fluid ounces short. Two weeks later the operation was repeated and the same results secured.

Inspection of these cartons was the responsibility of both the Food and Drug Directorate, the Department of Trade and Commerce, and in the case of fluid milk, the provincial department of agriculture. As a result of dual and triple control and lack of co-ordination, inspection failed to give consumers the protection they should have been receiving to ensure full value for their dollars.

After checking a complaint that cans of tomato juice labelled 20 fluid ounces did not contain that amount, C.A.C. decided that this matter needed a more thorough investigation. In 1964, some 237 cans of juices in seven different sizes, but chiefly in the most popular size, 20 fluid ounces, were purchased across Canada and shipped to a qualified testing laboratory for careful measurement of the contents.

I quote this to show that the Consumers Association of Canada has been doing very careful work on behalf of consumers in checking complaints and trying to have them remedied under existing legislation, and I believe the members of the association have every right to demand through some of us here that we make this legislation foolproof.

The laboratory reported that none of the cans labelled 105 fluid ounces contained 105 fluid ounces: only one in nine of those labelled 20 fluid ounces contained 20 fluid ounces. Only in the sizes labelled 48 fluid ounces and 10 fluid ounces did all samples contain the amount stated on the label. It was obvious that in most sizes it was very difficult and in some sizes impossible for processors to fill the cans with the amount stated on the label. These cans are of international standard sizes and the amount stated on the label is regulated under the Canada Agricultural Products Standard Act.

On the basis of the test, C.A.C. requested the Department of Agriculture to review its labelling requirements under this act to ensure that the labels of canned juices correctly state the amount of the contents of the can. The results of the test and this request were reported in the press.

Now I come to the moral of the story.

The matter was also referred to the food and drug directorate, which has the responsibility under the Food and Drugs Act that food shall not be labelled or sold in a manner which is false or misleading. The director immediately informed C.A.C. that the directorate was fully aware of the incorrect labelling and for ten years had been trying to get the Department of Agriculture to amend its regulations to require accurate labelling not only of canned juices but of canned juices, fruits and vegetables.

For ten years the food and drug directorate had been trying to get co-operation from the Department of Agriculture, and unless something is done to make this procedure more effective than has been the case in the past, Canadian consumers will be left very much under-protected. I continue with the quotation:

The Department of Agriculture has since taken action. Amended regulations of this department became fully effective on January 1st, 1966. Until C.A.C. discovered this deception and pressed for rectification of the labelling, the food and drug directorate was unable, on account of the inactivity of the Department of Agriculture, to carry out its responsibilities under the Food and Drugs Act.

I know that this bill provides for co-ordination of these different activities under the minister, but I maintain there is still something important lacking, and that is why I move:

That subclause (1) of clause 6 of Bill C-161 be amended by adding thereto the following new paragraph:

"(e) be empowered to secure information from any other department of the government to assist in the investigation of consumer complaints."

In other words, Mr. Chairman, we want to give the minister power to go into the Department of Agriculture, the food and drug directorate or whatever other department may be involved, to get information directly related to consumer complaints. If the bill remains in its present form there is nothing to prevent a situation happening again such as I outlined a few moments ago, where a consumer complaint was left unsolved for ten years while one department waited for another department to act.

This amendment does not propose the spending of public money. It does not interfere with provincial jurisdiction. It does not get the minister in wrong with industry. I really hope he approves of it. I may say that this is not my own idea. It comes from members of the Consumers Association of Canada, who are to be found all across the country. I feel this amendment would strengthen this clause in the bill.

The Chairman: Is the committee ready for the question?

Some hon. Members: Question.

● (9:30 p.m.)

Amendment (Mrs. MacInnis—Vancouver-Kingsway) negatived: Yeas 24; nays, 43.

Mr. Fawcett: Mr. Chairman, during all this debate I have not taken any of the time of