

Government Organization

goods generally, rather than in an isolated and spasmodic manner.

The Consumers Association of Canada has approached the government on many occasions to indicate its point of view. This is a voluntary group which has tried to help the consumer by making certain information available to the consuming public. It is significant to note that that association feels it cannot do the job by itself, but requires the co-operation of the government.

I should like to read from a letter on the letterhead of the Consumers Association of Canada over the signature of Beryl A. Plumptre, national president, dated April 12, 1966. In part she says:

Our association feels strongly that there should be one minister of the government whose chief responsibility should be to safeguard the economic position of consumers and to ensure that in discussion of government policy due consideration will be given to the effects of this policy on consumers.

Perhaps the name of this department is not important and if we were just talking about a name this discussion would be academic. The debate raised today and the amendment that has been moved concerns far more than a name, but rather the emphasis that should be placed on the proposed department. If the government wants to do a good job in respect of consumers affairs there is no reason why such a department could not be named in the suggested fashion and made directly responsible for things relating to consumers, under the head of one minister, rather than as an adjunct to another department with other duties.

The suggested reorganization with the responsibilities that have been drawn together are, with a few exceptions, satisfactory and relevant to the entire question of consumer protection. I listened with interest and admiration to my colleague the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway the other night when she spoke about four particular needs of consumers. Many consumer needs have been enunciated by other members who have participated in this debate and I should like to refer specifically to one, that the consumer must have the right to be heard. We do not feel that the consumer's voice is heard loud enough in the councils of the cabinet. I do not attach blame to anyone particularly in this regard, but by the very nature of cabinet organization the voice of the consumer becomes submerged.

Theoretically everyone is interested in the consumer because all of us are consumers.

Theoretically everyone is speaking as a consumer and for the consumer, but in practice cabinet ministers have specific responsibilities in respect of specific elements of our society. As has been pointed out, we have a Department of Industry the chief concern of which is, and certainly should be, the efficient operation and encouragement of industry in Canada. We have a Department of Trade and Commerce with its responsibilities. We have a Department of Labour with its responsibilities. We could go on in this particular fashion. We also need a department of consumer affairs because the consumer has an important role to play in the deliberations that take place in the cabinet. We could resolve many of our problems connected with tariffs and taxes if the voice of the consumer could be heard.

• (7:10 p.m.)

I should like to give the committee one indication in this regard. In Canada we have a national oil policy that has been devised over a number of years. It is a policy shrouded in vagueness. Even the person responsible for its administration has to admit on occasion that it is difficult to define and not easy to understand. There may be nothing wrong with the oil policy for Canada; I am not prepared to say. What I am prepared to say, though, is that when the national oil policy for Canada was set up, it was set up at the urging of certain interests and I question whether the implications to the consumer were fully understood, fully appreciated or fully taken into consideration.

I have received a copy of a letter that was sent to Hon. Mitchell Sharp, Minister of Finance, in connection with the national oil policy, in which the writer indicates the effect this policy is having on consumers in Canada. He is asking for a repeal of some of the orders in council that established fair market value for oil and gasoline products coming into Canada. He says:

The order only increases profits for the integrated companies in Canada, it withdraws more than \$1 million from the Canadian income tax volume, it eliminates market competition and only helps to strengthen the oil and price monopoly of the integrated companies, and punishes the Canadian consumer with excessive prices. We have made computations which show that the Canadian economy would save approximately \$500 million per year for motor gasoline, if the market would be freed from the price control of the integrated companies which at the present time is supported by your government—

It is also clear that the "fair market value" in the U.K., Aden, Germany, Italy—and even Venezuela—is around 7 cents per gallon. The difference