

*Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act*

regard to packaging and labelling of products. As a matter of fact, the minister with great enthusiasm this afternoon said that surely the Canadian consumer was entitled to be protected against such deception. I very firmly believe that the Canadian consumer is entitled to be protected against deception in regard to packaging and labelling, and this the bill will provide in a number of ways. First of all, it gives the minister power to take various steps that will eliminate the undue proliferation of various shapes and sizes of packages, as well as prohibit such gimmicks as "cents off" and the use of peculiar terms like "giant size", "jumbo size", and other deceptive terms leading to false labelling in a number of ways.

We thoroughly agree with such provisions and hope they will be enforced. However, to our mind the bill will not prevent deception in one very important area; that is to say, it will not enable the consumer to avoid being deceived in regard to which package is the best value for the money. In committee we made reference to experiments conducted in the United States with experienced women shoppers who were invited to see whether they could pick from a number of items what in their judgment was the best value for money. These experiments decisively proved over the course of a number of years that the women were deceived in more than half of the choices they made, able and experienced though they were.

In our committee the members of this group conducted an experiment one day which proved precisely the same thing, though on a much smaller scale. We had three products with us, three sizes of the same brand of bottled ketchup, three sizes of Rice Crispies and three packages of Arctic Power. We told the head of the grocery manufacturers association the price of each bottle of ketchup which was printed on the label, the size of each bottle, that is the number of fluid ounces it contained. We then invited him to say which bottle he thought gave the shopper best value for money. He was unable to pass that tests, and said so.

Then we did the same thing with the Rice Crispies. We told him the price on the package and the weight of the contents, but he was unable to say which gave best value for money. Although he did guess the third product correctly, we proved in committee that an experienced and able shopper was unable consistently to determine the best value for money. Without the aid of pencil and paper, computer or slide-rule she was quite unable to determine which product gave best value for money. In other words, she was deceived by a combination of quantity and price. This deception remains in the marketplace, and will still remain after this legislation is passed unless the minister is disposed to change his mind at this eleventh hour and confer a benefit on the consumer by so doing.

There is only one way to prevent this kind of deception, and that is by unit pricing. We should include in the bill the provision that every package must display the price of the package, the total amount of the product in the package and the price per unit, whether it be per pound, per quart, or whatever the relevant unit may be.

[Mrs. MacInnis.]

This does not have to be done, as the minister knows very well, in respect of anything like all the packages on the shelves, but there are certain types of packages where unit pricing is absolutely essential if the consumer is not to be deceived.

● (8:10 p.m.)

We ran into some resistance from people, particularly those in the retail trade, to the idea of unit pricing. Manufacturers were really not opposed in principle to it, but retailers did express opposition. Quite frankly, I felt that their opposition to unit pricing did not contribute to assisting consumers to find the best value in the marketplace. Unit pricing was recommended in the Batten report after a study of grocery prices on the Prairies, as reported in 1968. It was recommended as a very good method to help the consumer. It was also recommended by consumer reports in the United States and it is being tried out in the supermarkets of that country to the south. It is being tried out in at least one grocery chain in Ontario. It is also being used widely across Canada in respect of certain items in supermarkets.

For example, when we buy packages of cheese or meat we find on them the exact weight, the total price and the price per pound. It makes little difference what the shape of the piece of meat under the cellophane is, what the shape of the piece of cheese is or the contents of either, because the unit price is marked there. The consumer is therefore well informed and cannot be deceived as to the value she is receiving for her money.

Why will the minister not accept the principle of unit prices? This afternoon he quoted with great enthusiasm the words of Dr. Jacob Ziegel in respect of another matter. In a moment I intend to quote that same authority to him in another context. I should like to say, first, that the minister's objections to unit pricing seem to boil down to only two. First of all, he was uncertain about the cost of putting unit pricing into effect.

This was the main objection of the retailers when they voiced their opinion; they said it would raise the price of items to the consumer. Let me point out in that regard that no matter what price the consumer is paying for the package. I would be very doubtful whether the additional cost of putting a unit price on the package would come anywhere near the price the consumer pays today as a result of being bamboozled, deceived and completely bewildered by the juggling of prices and quantities. This is the trap she must face when trying to decide the best value.

The minister can determine those products in respect of which it would be beneficial to have unit pricing. This decision would be within the discretion of the minister and would involve only certain lines of products. I believe the consumer would be well advised to pay any additional costs caused by unit pricing, knowing exactly when she is getting the best value instead of going into this blindfolded because she does not have a slide-rule, computer or something else with her. I think this is an objection which can be very readily and sufficiently answered. I am sure it can be thrown out of court easily.