

Combines Investigation Act

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Mississauga (Mr. Abbott) on a point of order.

Mr. Abbott: My point of order is that I did not refer to the amendment as baloney; I referred to the content of the remarks of the hon. member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) as baloney.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Leggatt: In view of those remarks, Mr. Speaker, I am sure we can expect a favourable vote on the amendment today. Since the hon. member seems to find favour with the amendment but not with the speech, I will be delighted if he will join this courageous group on the question of advertising and vote for these very sensible amendments which certainly should recommend themselves to anyone with some experience in advertising and of enforcing the existing provisions.

I was interested in what the hon. member for Mississauga had to say about the general provisions which he said are satisfactory and general enough that prosecutors will not have their hands tied. In fact, the reverse is true. If you talk to anyone who has had experience in prosecuting firms for misleading advertising, they will tell you the success ratio is very low. One of the real problems is that we have no properly legislated, clear standards of what is a violation and what is not. The work "misleading" is far too broad and generic to be of any value whatsoever. Convictions under the act are difficult—almost impossible.

What the hon. member for Nickel Belt is attempting to accomplish is something that I thought would have recommended itself to all members of this House, that is, simply the question of providing truth in advertising. I am pessimistic enough, however, to believe that when these amendments come to a vote tonight we will have the usual lock-up between the government side and the official opposition in opposing the strengthening of those provisions dealing with the marketplace and the manipulation of the consumer by advertising.

There is no way that we can continue to argue out of one side of our mouths that society is becoming permissive, is becoming soft, and yet when it comes time to be counted in this House and lay some of the blame where it belongs, on the advertising media of this country, we say that we cannot interfere in the marketplace.

It ill becomes the Prime Minister of this country to go on television and waggle his finger at the Canadian population, as he did the other night, and say, "You fellows have been living too high on the hog. You are to blame for this inflation. You people out there have been buying too much; you have been seeking too much." Surely it is the responsibility of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) to do something about the way the public has been manipulated, by advertising, into seeking the most useless kind of cosmetic junk that is promoted over and over again because of the capitalist demands of the media.

● (1520)

Nobody answers what the organs of communication tell us. There is no anti-advertising program. Therefore, when representatives of my party propose amendments to put teeth into the "truth in advertising" concept, they meet

[Mr. Abbott.]

the typical response, "We cannot change the market-place. Besides, you may reduce sales; your proposal is too harsh on some who produce in the marketplace." Nothing is further from the truth.

I am going to talk about how some companies advertise. The other day we went to McDonald's. They have not improved their product; they have improved their menu instead. In the restaurant it is not the food that is important, but the picture of the food on the menu; and every time the picture gets better the price goes up. They have not improved service, but their advertising.

The Post Office also advertises. Because of the many complaints it received from across the country it introduced something called guaranteed mail service. The department painted post boxes with a nice white line and said, "Now you have guaranteed mail service". But the service continued to decline and became less and less guaranteed. That Crown corporation fell into a trap which had been set, by example, by major commercial corporations. The trick in advertising is to tell the Hitler-like big lie. Don't tell a small lie; you have to tell a really big one.

Imperial Oil's advertising about the north looks very appealing. They portray themselves as nice guys in the north who are concerned about our ecology. Let me tell you that if anyone is threatening the ecology of the north, it is the oil companies. Their advertising tries to counter criticism. They indulge in the big lie technique and say, "Our people are up there; they are concerned about the ducks." They show people rowing their little boats across lakes and having a grand time protecting "your ecology in the north."

Actually, in 1971 Imperial Oil was told to discontinue its operations in the Mackenzie delta because the company was breaking conservation rules laid down by the Department of the Environment. The department was slow to act. Companies like to use the big lie technique. Just consider what is happening in the north. If you watch "Hockey Night in Canada" you will see Imperial Oil using prime time every Saturday night to bring you this message: It takes a lot of money to develop the north. It costs \$10 million to sink a hole in the Beaufort Sea.

The company really is saying that the government should keep its sticky fingers out of company business so that profits can be kept at a maximum, otherwise the company cannot operate. The company says this in prime television time and there is no opportunity for political response. It does not claim its oil is better or that its service is superior. It does not even try to sell its product directly. It is selling an insidious idea, an idea to which the government or those who hold the opposite view cannot respond. So you can see how the Hitler-like, big lie technique is one of the most insidious influences which we must fight in this country. It manipulates the public, its values and standards. This is done by advertising.

People tell us we are becoming a permissive society because we have so many welfare bums or people drawing unemployment insurance. Apparently we are soft because we do not want the poor to starve or the unemployed to go hungry. Actually, we are soft because subtly, insidiously we are being manipulated to want things which make us soft, and no section of our population is more open to manipulation by advertising than the female section.