

complex and vital bills that has been introduced in this House for a long time.

I sometimes wonder whether items that are supposed to do so much good for the ills of the consumer actually work out that way. The modern market place is complex, reflecting, above all, the complexity of the needs and wants of consumers. Our marketing system has not developed willy-nilly, but rather includes a number of built-in safeguards, among them the basic intelligence and good sense of consumers, the role of retailers in tailoring available supply to customer demands, and existing laws providing consumer guarantees, standards and protection.

The minister stated that we have a great deal of legislation which deals with the protection of consumers. I wish to refer briefly to the legislation dealing with hazardous products. Great emphasis has been placed on the labelling of hazardous products. We seem to have overlooked the fact that hazardous products are detrimental to children. Many cases involving hazardous products concern children who are unable to read. Children are most often the victims of hazardous products such as bleaches, detergents, pills and other drugs. This packaging bill should place greater emphasis on safe packaging of pills, drugs, bleaches and other hazardous products that are easily accessible to children. Often their health is destroyed and in many cases they die.

The minister indicated that approximately 7,000 articles are available in today's supermarket. Within a few years this number will reach 20,000. This is a complex bill. Why were those who are involved with producing and selling packages not called upon for assistance in preparing this legislation? It is true the minister said they will be invited to appear before the committee, but I feel if the intention is to produce good legislation the people engaged in the business should be consulted at an early stage. After all, these packages and labels are all there for a reason. We have all seen what has happened in connection with other bills. Legislation is prepared and, in many cases, it falls short of what is required. Those who have had a tremendous amount of experience in the commercial and industrial world should be asked for assistance in situations of this kind. I am sure there are lots of manufacturers' organizations and consumers' groups who would be willing to assist in making sure that good legislation is put before the House.

● (5:00 p.m.)

The minister has told us that packaging is to be standardized. I cannot help wondering how soon it will be before there is a standardization of prices, before every package on every shelf in a store will carry the same price tag for comparable articles. For myself, I hope this time will never come, because if it did it would destroy the initiative of manufacturers, the desire of people to put a product on the market and work in the marketplace as they should.

We on this side of the House are a little disturbed about the legislation before us because, once again, we see that provision has been made for the governor in

Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act

council to issue regulations. For example, he can exempt, conditionally or unconditionally, any pre-packaged product or class of pre-packaged products from any or all of the provisions of the act or regulations. This leaves the road open for a lot of possibilities. Even a little politics could enter, here. Someone who is a friend of the minister might be exempted from the effect of this legislation and he could place his product on the market without complying with the regulations laid down for others.

Then again, the minister indicated it might take five years for this measure to become effective. Well, in five years from now most of the produce presently on the shelves of merchants and retailers in Canada will have been replaced. The minister tells us that some packages are short-filled. I believe that in labelling, emphasis should be placed on the date of the package; a product may have been on the shelf for two years, and, naturally, there is shrinkage in this space of time. A number of products can, of course, be kept on shelves for long periods without deteriorating. Consideration should be given to this aspect. It occurs to me that another difficulty is likely to arise in connection with a wide range of imported products now available. Their number has increased year by year as many new Canadians come to this country and demand some of the products they have used at home.

We ought to consider carefully the effect this legislation is likely to have on the cost of living. It is true the proliferation of packages will probably be reduced, but the cost of altering the present system may well be substantial. I know, for example, that the cost of the box in which one company packs its woolen blankets is 50 cents. Under the legislation before us, this packaging might have to be changed. One can imagine the cost to the manufacturer if he is required to do so—and we must not forget that the cost of the packaging is added to the cost of the product itself.

I feel, sometimes, that some of these proposals intended to be for the good of the consumer do not, in the end, turn out to be much benefit when they are accompanied by government regimentation. In this case the cost of meeting new packaging requirements might add 2 per cent, 3 per cent, 5 per cent or even 10 per cent to the price in some cases. The expense might be enormous in some cases.

When we first look at this legislation it might appear to contain a good suggestion; we have all had our problems in the supermarkets in deciding between one package and another. But we should bear in mind that packages are arranged in the way they are, probably because consumers demanded packages of that type. It is not always the manufacturer who is to blame for the existence of all these types and varieties. Think of all the different soaps and detergents we can use nowadays, for example, the soaps made for use in dishwashers as distinct from washing machines. There is a tremendous complexity in this field.

When the bill gets to committee we must take a careful look at it. I was glad to hear the minister say that before the regulations were changed at any time consumer