All members will agree that it is of the utmost importance that drug safety be a paramount consideration. Drugs that hazard health are intolerably expensive at any price; but let us consider the arguments which are advanced in some quarters in opposition to this bill. Patents have nothing to do with the quality of drugs. Assurance of quality depends upon the controls exercised by the Food and Drug Directorate and quality controls exercised by the manufacturer. All manufacturers must meet all the requirements of the Food and Drugs Act and regulations. The government cannot check every batch. That is clearly impossible. But new requirements went into effect in May. The require that manufacturers must have information available in Canada to the effect that all requirements relating to manufacturing facilities and controls are being met. The drug must either be analysed in Canada or the data concerning its potency must be listed and made available. The onus is on the manufacturer and the information must be available in Canada so that we will know exactly what is in the drug which is manufactured abroad and brought here.

Contrary to the implications of some, a patent confers no guarantee of quality. Indeed, let those who espouse this belief present evidence to indicate that quality declines in a product whose patent expires or is not patented at all. It is too bad that the people who appear on television and talk about the dangers of this legislation did not provide persuasive evidence to the successive commissions which invited them to do so.

Mr. Basford: They have not read the act.

Mr. Perrault: As the minister points out, they have not read the act. How did the Harley committee deal with this allegation? What the Harley committee said about this appears at page 12 as follows:

• (3:50 p.m.)

> Unfortunately the brand name manufacturer often gives the impression that generic products are not safe.

The report of the committee then stated:

> It is the opinion of your committee, however, that this viewpoint is not necessarily valid, it not only having been challenged by the generic drug manufacturers but also by purchasing agents of some hospitals and government departments who have ordered and continue to order ... drugs by their generic name.

Government agencies are using these drugs and this has been pointed out earlier today. I ask hon. members to note the following, again from the Harley report:

> The food and drug directorate made it clear that, in their opinion, based on the testing they performed, generic name drugs and brand name drugs are equally "safe".

Indeed, it was reported to this house earlier in a speech today that a percentage of the products, for one reason or another, labelling or contents, is the same in respect of drugs manufactured in Canada and those manufactured abroad. Drugs sold under a common or proper name do not differ significantly from those sold under a brand name according to tests conducted by the food and drug directorate.

The proposed amendment allowing the importation of drugs into Canada under compulsory licencing presents no new elements as far as the importation of the active ingredient and the preparation of dosage forms in Canada are concerned. At the present time, as hon. members know, there is no bar to the importation of non-patented drugs as basic chemicals into Canada for manufacturing into dosage forms. Both brand name and generic manufacturers are importing fine chemicals now for finishing into dosage forms.

Again, before the Harley committee, as recorded at page 2022, the question of domestic drugs vis-a-vis imported drugs was discussed by Dr. R. A. Chapman, director of the Food and Drug Directorate. He said:

> In summary, then, we do not have evidence that imported drugs represent a significant hazard to health.

He then said:

> However, we feel that to ensure that this situation prevails in the future it will be necessary to periodically assess the manufacturing facilities and controls of foreign firms exporting drugs to Canada.

This is the kind of action which is being taken. The importation of basic pharmaceutical ingredients under compulsory licence is not likely to be any different from the situation that exists at present.

In this house at the beginning of this debate the hon. minister gave the assurance—he is present and he has done an outstanding job in respect of this measure—that high standards would be maintained. In effect, he has assured this house on behalf of the government that if the importation of finished dosage forms from a wider selection of sources necessitates additional measures to ensure that these drugs meet all the requirements of the Food and Drug Act and regulations, these additional measures will be taken.