

Adjournment Debate

addressed questions to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Ouellet) concerning the continued sale of these popular colonial-style infant cribs. I pointed out that even the manufacturers admit that the tall corner posts are hazardous. There has already been one tragic incident in Canada when a little girl was accidentally strangled with her pyjamas in Peace River, and there have been 14 similar deaths involving these colonial-style cribs in the United States.

Some manufacturers, however, are unwilling to modify the design of these corner posts on their own for fear of competitive disadvantage. Several manufacturers have asked Mr. Jim Black, head of the Consumer Affairs Department product safety branch, to press for government intervention to compel all crib manufacturers to withdraw these cribs from the market, pending some modification of the design.

In the meantime, many spring catalogues carry advertisements of these colonial-style cribs in the absence of an official order by the Government of Canada to eliminate this hazard at once.

● (2215)

When we are dealing with the free marketplace, I and many of my colleagues on this side of the House would argue strenuously for less government regulation, less government intervention and more freedom for crib manufacturers and, indeed, manufacturers of any household product to operate in as truly a free enterprise system as possible. I draw the line, however, when these products can affect the lives and safety of Canadians, particularly our children, the little ones who are powerless to make judgments on what may be a hazardous product and what is not. When it gets to the point where the manufacturers themselves recognize the clear danger present in the current design of these cribs and are requesting a government order to withdraw them from the market before any more tragic deaths occur, then I feel I am justified in asking the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs the kinds of questions I put to him last week.

What progress is his department making under the Hazardous Products Act in connection with these colonial style cribs, and what is behind one of the minister's departmental official's charging that there has been foot dragging on this matter and another being quoted as saying he would "try to do something, but that will be a slow process"?

The minister was unprepared to answer my questions last Monday. He said he would check with his officials on both matters raised. I am sorry the minister left the chamber only a few moments ago. I thought he would want to say personally where his product safety branch stands in connection with the specific issue of the colonial-style cribs.

I am told that Vancouver retailers are taking their responsibilities seriously. Many large chains are voluntarily pulling these cribs off the floors. At least one west coast retailer is offering refunds to customers if they purchased these colonial-style cribs prior to May 1. That may be happening elsewhere in Canada. It is an indication that retailers are sensitive to public pressure and will, when necessary, voluntarily pull

hazardous products off the shelves and out of the showrooms. Of course, there will be other retailers who know they have a popular thing going and, in the absence of legislation, will not remove these admittedly dangerous products.

One other thing worries me: there is nothing to prevent manufacturers who may feel compelled to withdraw these products from the domestic market from exporting these cribs to other countries. I would be interested in knowing what latitude the government will allow Canadian manufacturers to export hazardous products if, as, and when the department recognizes that these popular cribs can be dangerous.

The questions raised, however, about the high corner posts on infant cribs, in my view, go to the heart of the ability of the product safety branch to protect the public from obvious hazardous products; obvious, at least, to the manufacturers themselves and obvious, certainly, to Canadians who have experienced tragedy because of these products. I worry about the capacity of the minister's department to deal with urgent situations which arise such as the one we are discussing this evening.

Let me quote one disturbing paragraph in an article in the *Ottawa Citizen* of Monday, March 16, 1981—"Hazardous cribs still widely sold"—in which Dr. Kamlesh Gupta, the consumer department's chief of mechanical and electrical hazards "admitted the department has been dragging its heels on the issue. He said a lack of resources forced the department to rely on slowly evolving crib safety research being conducted in the United States." I would like to know what else Dr. Gupta, Mr. Black and others in the product safety branch are waiting for? On how many other products on the shelves, floors and showrooms of this nation must we Canadian await word from slowly evolving studies in the United States? Do we have to wait for serious injury or death in Canada to have the departments' attention drawn to the need to alert and safeguard the consumer?

I realize that it is unfair to ask the minister to deal specifically with anything other than the subject matter of tonight's adjournment debate, but I serve notice that at the earliest appropriate time I will ask the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs to table a list of products that the product safety branch is investigating, and particularly the list of products on which we have been awaiting word from the United States, such as the hazardous colonial style cribs.

Mr. Gary F. McCauley (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, as crib finials—or corner posts, as they are popularly known—of the type involved in the death of the child referred to by the hon. member for Hamilton-Wentworth (Mr. Scott) are not covered by regulations under the Hazardous Products Act, departmental officials have been engaged in a study of such features.

The department first learned of the child's death in July, 1980. The next month the director of the product safety branch advised manufacturers and importers of furniture for juveniles and those who had expressed an interest in product