

CONFERENCE ON CONSUMER AFFAIRS

The first federal-provincial conference of ministers on consumer affairs was held in Ottawa on April 10 and 11. The federal delegation was led by Mr. Ron Basford, Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, who chaired the meetings. Leaders of the provincial delegations were: Ontario, Mr. Leslie Rowntree, Minister of Financial and Commercial Affairs; Quebec, Mr. François-Eugène Mathieu, Acting Minister of Financial Institutions, Corporations and Co-operatives; Nova Scotia, Mr. E.D. Haliburton, Provincial Secretary; Manitoba, Mr. J.B. Carroll, Provincial Secretary (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs); British Columbia, Mrs. Patricia Jordan, Minister without Portfolio; Alberta, Mr. A.R. Patrick, Minister of Industry and Tourism; Saskatchewan, Mr. Darrel V. Heald, Attorney General; Newfoundland, Dr. G. Alain Frecker, Minister of Provincial Affairs; New Brunswick, Mr. Harry Cochran, Deputy Provincial Secretary; Prince Edward Island, Mr. M.B. Fitzpatrick, Director of Consumer Services, Department of the Provincial Secretary.

PACKAGING AND LABELLING

The conference reviewed the variety of labelling and packaging regulations now applicable to many consumer goods in Canada. Ministers recognized that there was scope to improve and extend labelling and packaging standards. The federal delegation explained its intention to provide for clearer disclosure in labelling and to deal with misleading labelling and packaging practices. This would involve more uniformity in declarations of the contents of consumer goods and in the nomenclature used in describing grade standards. The conference also noted the intention of the Federal Government to introduce mandatory rules to govern the labelling of textiles by fibre content.

HAZARDOUS PRODUCTS

The federal delegation outlined the provisions of the Hazardous Products Act which is now before Parliament and expected to become law very shortly. They invited the provincial authorities to let the federal authorities know of any hazards that might require regulation under this statute. Provincial delegations welcomed this legislation and expressed their desire to co-operate by providing whatever information they could.

CONSUMER CREDIT

The conference discussed at length the problems that sometimes arise from the use of promissory notes, cut-off clauses and disclaimer clauses in connection with instalment sales contracts for consumer goods and services. Promissory notes, when assigned by the vendor or dealer to a "holder in due course", usually a sales finance company or a bank, normally become unconditional obligations which are not subject to the usual defences and offsets that might have existed between the buyer and the seller.

It was agreed that to solve the problems parallel action was required at the federal and provincial level. A number of possible courses to deal with the abuses that affect consumers were discussed. These included the method of amendments to the Bills of Exchange Act, the federal statute governing promissory notes, and the provincial Sales of Goods Acts, the provincial legislation governing sales contracts. The ministers agreed to consult their governments on appropriate courses of action.

The conference also reviewed the federal and provincial credit disclosure legislation and the federal Interest Act. Study of the Interest Act would be made to assure its suitability to modern lending practices. It was agreed that any revision of the Interest Act would require full federal-provincial consultations well in advance and in detail.

CONSUMER INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Ministers were agreed on the importance of consumer information and education and exchanged views about their programmes in this field. There was general agreement on the desirability of exchanging informational materials for these programmes, and a committee of officials was proposed to assist in coordinating this.

MISLEADING ADVERTISING

The conference noted that the omnibus criminal code bill now before Parliament provides for the transfer of Section 306 of the Criminal Code to the Combines Investigation Act. This section prohibits misleading advertising. The meeting agreed that the administration of these provisions by the Combines Investigation staff should provide for more effective enforcement. This enforcement would ensure that advertising associated with promotional contests would be subject to stricter scrutiny.

TRADE WITH PACIFIC NATIONS

Mr. Jean-Luc Pepin, Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce, recently investigated "on-the-spot" the possibilities for increased trade between Canada and the countries of the "Pacific rim".

Mr. Pepin's tour, which began in Tokyo on April 20 following the fifth Canada-Japan Ministerial Meeting there, included Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand. The Minister arrived back in Canada on May 3.

Mr. Pepin met with government and business leaders to discuss the expansion of Canadian trade relations with the countries concerned and to identify areas in which Canadian trade and investment could play a more important role.

Mr. Pepin said recently that Canada's trade with Pacific countries had increased substantially in recent years, reaching a total of more than \$1.5 billion in 1968. His visit to these countries marks the first time a Canadian trade minister has undertaken such an extensive tour of the area.