

Patent Act—Trade Marks Act

• (2:50 p.m.)

I think the matter of the introduction of new drugs in this country in the future should concern us. I understand that the Food and Drug Directorate will now require a five-year guarantee that the producer will be the sole maker and seller of a new drug in Canada. I welcome this because I believe it will foster the introduction of new drugs into the Canadian market as it will give the producer of new drugs at least five years during which time he will be able to exploit the market if he is successful and to ensure he will not have a competitor. I would like to point out that without this measure there will be little desire on the part of new drug manufacturers to introduce drugs in any great quantities if they feel there is a possibility these drugs could be picked up by their competitors as soon as they became popular and are promoted and established.

There is one area concerning which I would like to say a few words, and on this the success or failure of this bill will rest so far as its application is concerned. This legislation will put the drug industry almost wholly in the hands of the director of the Food and Drug Directorate. He will be the one who will determine whether or not new drugs and new licences will be issued. This is an enormous responsibility. It may well raise the question of delegated legislation because the number and brands of drugs that are to be introduced into this country will depend on whether or not the director grants import licences. The second person on whom much depends is, of course, the physician. It is he who will decide whether or not to prescribe a cheaper drug.

We should consider the effect of drugs and we should keep some perspective. I know of a hospital whose capital cost amounts to \$1,200,000 a year. Their drug bill amounts to \$30,000. Even with the most rigid economizing it is unlikely that its drug bill could be reduced by more than \$5,000 or \$10,000. When one considers that in a hospital employing 200 or more people all the patients are receiving one form of drug or another and probably 60 per cent of them receive regulated drug therapy, one must retain a sense of perspective concerning the cost of drugs. We can have cheaper drugs if we wish to have fewer of them or if we wish to have less effective ones or a greater variety and variance in their quality.

The Food and Drug Directorate apparently feels that the circulation of pamphlets to doctors would be of considerable value. I would like to remind the minister that doctors have

[Mr. Ritchie.]

many circulars coming to their desks. It does not really seem to be very useful to add further circulars, particularly a drug price list. Most likely it will not be available when the physician wants it or could use it. So I think that this method of attempting to reduce drug costs is of doubtful value.

Finally, I would like to say that I am looking forward with particular interest to dealing with the clauses of the bill concerning the retention of efficiency in drug inspection when the bill reaches the committee.

Mr. Max Saltzman (Waterloo): Mr. Speaker, although this debate has just commenced the points made by a number of physicians in the house are emerging very clearly. It is fairly obvious that all of us are concerned about the high price of drugs and about the old, sick and weak in this country. But there seems to be some difference as to how the problem should be tackled. If I may be permitted to say so, the Conservative position may be summarized in this way. They say: "We are concerned about making drugs available to people who cannot afford them. Let us subsidize the industry, but for goodness sake let us not touch the companies nor affect their profits. They are sacrosanct. The government of this country must subsidize these companies, not bring the price down. That is wrong." This seems to be the Conservative position at the moment. I think they are men of good will who are concerned about those who are suffering in this country because they cannot afford the necessary drugs.

The Liberal position is similar, particularly the position taken by the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (Mr. Allmand), who seems to have spent a good part of the time at his disposal soothing the drug companies and assuring them that their profits were not going to be affected very much by this legislation, that nothing terrible was going to happen to them, that nothing drastic was on the horizon, and that they did not have too much to worry about. I might say to the hon. member that he is one of the more courageous Liberals in the house. Here is a man who is willing to collide with the drug companies, which is more than can be said for some other hon. members in this chamber. We are all aware of the enormous influence that the drug companies have exercised on members of this house and members of the other place. I say this as a compliment to the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, but it is still an indication that even that courageous man had to get up and defend the profits of the