

*Proceedings on Adjournment Motion*

says no. Therefore, the pharmacists are fastening themselves like leeches on the helpless bodies of the poor. I realize recent reports indicate that some pharmacists say they will not carry out the direction from their association, but the direction is there.

On April 24 the Pharmacists Society wrote to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. They presented a brief to him which includes all the facts from their point of view. At the same time, the British Columbia Minister of Welfare drew to the attention of the minister the serious implications of federal and provincial sponsored drug programs. This was as a result of the decision of the British Columbia Professional Pharmacist Society to make a \$1 surcharge on prescriptions to welfare patients. The provincial minister stated that druggists already receive no less than a 66 $\frac{2}{3}$  per cent mark-up on drugs dispensed to welfare patients. This is precisely the reason I am raising this question tonight.

The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs has been trying, in some respects, to achieve co-operation with the relevant provincial authorities. He has been trying hard. I urge him, personally, to take a hand in this matter as it is his job to protect consumers. Those who are ill and on welfare need his help most of all.

Less than two weeks ago the minister presided over the first federal-provincial conference of ministers of consumer affairs in Ottawa. It appears this was a very successful conference. Cabinet Minister without Portfolio, Mrs. Patricia Jordan represented the British Columbia government. I suggest that the federal minister should now profit from this contact and discuss with the provincial government ways and means of dealing with this drug situation in order to protect those who are completely dependent on welfare payments for their supply of drugs.

The minister must face the situation that if these people are forced to pay this \$1 surcharge from their meagre welfare allowances, they simply will not be able to get their prescriptions filled. They will not get the drugs they require. I appeal to the minister, in his capacity as champion of the consumer, to take a hand himself in this matter, together with the provincial minister of welfare of British Columbia, which involves so many helpless consumers.

**Mr. Stanley Haidasz (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, I share the concern of

[Mrs. MacInnis.]

the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis) with respect to the high cost and availability of drugs and proper medical care for these people who need it most. That is why the government has introduced the Canada Assistance Plan and, in this session, Bill C-102 to meet these problems.

In the present case, as my minister indicated to the hon. member on April 16, the department is aware of the British Columbia situation. Since then, the minister has received a letter from the Hon. Dan Campbell, minister of social welfare for British Columbia, asking for a combines investigation. This has been referred to the combines branch. The director has the matter under review at the present moment to ascertain whether it provides reason to believe that the act has been violated. The minister also stated that the practice of pharmacy is within provincial jurisdiction under their provincial licensing authority. When Bill C-102 was introduced in the house last October, the minister informed the house of our five point program to tackle the high cost of drugs. The fifth step in that program involves discussions with the province designed to tackle the problem of the high cost of the retail distribution of drugs, important aspects of which are within provincial jurisdiction. Arrangements have already been initiated to bring the provinces and our department together for the purpose of these discussions.

The minister has already outlined to the house a very clear and cogent program for dealing with the high cost of drugs, and I can assure the house that any supplementary measures which are available to him will be given full consideration. Certainly any infractions of the Combines Investigation Act will be dealt with firmly. I should like to add also that the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Basford) has been informed by the Director of the Investigation and Research Branch under the Combines Investigation Act that many reports have been received over the past several years about the adoption of some kind of formula pricing by druggists, usually by way of relationship to cost plus prescription fees. Whenever such reports have come to his attention he has been in touch with the pharmaceutical associations concerned and has indicated to them that the adoption of such a system by agreement would give rise to a question under the Combines Investigation Act, unless the system has been adopted pursuant to valid provincial legislation.