

*Broadcasting Act*

and the federal communications commission, which are respectively responsible for unfair business practices and broadcast licensing, were very concerned.

In the early part of this month the federal trade commission held a week of hearings exclusively on children's advertising. They did so because, I think it is fair to say, there is an escalating war over children's commercials taking place in the United States between concerned parent groups, broadcasting networks and the television industry. I hope that we in this country can look to this example and prevent its occurrence hereby taking quick steps to prevent a similar situation from developing on our own airwaves.

I would like, briefly, to pass along some of the comments made at the FTC hearing earlier this month. For example, one witness suggested that in the midst of a drug culture crisis, ads on television make taking a pill or vitamins no more serious than eating candy. This is the kind of thing to which our children are being subjected. Another said that in most food commercials, children are encouraged regularly to gobble up foodstuffs that contain almost nothing but syrup and sugar. Nutritionists in the states have expressed concern over this and have even labelled it "sugaration". For another example, we have all seen ads which deal with instant transfiguration on television where an individual takes something and suddenly life is beautiful or at least substantially improved. This transfiguration occurs right before our eyes.

I could go on for some time with examples of this kind which can be seen daily over our two television networks. However, suffice it to say we all agree we should start improving these forms of advertising wherever possible. I believe we as legislators, and certainly the government of Canada, have a real responsibility in this area. I repeat, Mr. Speaker, we have a golden opportunity in this country to learn from the experience in the United States and what is happening there. We would be remiss if we did not seize this opportunity and take advantage of it.

There are some frightening statistics which underline the persuasiveness of television for children. For example, our research indicates that a great deal of work has been done in this area by Ralph Nader's centre for the study of responsive law. This demonstrates that in the United States the normal pre-school child watches an average of 54 hours of television a week. I think the same applies to Canada, although statistics are not available.

• (4:10 p.m.)

On April 6 a sample was taken. It would probably be misleading to take a sample during the Christmas season when television advertising reaches its peak. But the result of that sample showed that the CBC ran 54 advertisements between 11 a.m. and 11.51 p.m. Assuming that a child watches, on average, between three and four hours of television a day, in that period he would have to absorb some 26 commercials ranging from those dealing with personal hygienic problems to the advantages of consuming or buying certain types of cereals.

There is no question that television in Canada, as in the United States, has become saturated with this kind of commercial message aimed at influencing parents through the children. What do we know about the psychological effects of this form of advertising upon our chil-

[Mr. McGrath.]

dren? We know very little about it though it is an area of research which requires immediate attention. It has been calculated that children are subjected to some 350,000 television commercials by the time they leave high school. Is it not natural that they should grow to be deeply suspicious of a society which apparently lies systematically for profit? This is what happens many times in the course of the exaggeration and overselling we find on television today. Who knows, this may be one of the causes of the rebellion among youth which we are witnessing in our society.

I realize that both our public and private television networks have shown commendable initiative in preparing voluntary guides to govern their acceptance of advertisements aimed at children. One of these initiatives was taken quite recently—as a matter of fact within the past two months. The Canadian Association of Broadcasters, for example, has prepared and released a code of ethics to govern advertising on children's programs. It is an impressive code. It is a step in the right direction. The CBC has initiated a similar code.

Although these documents reflect what I feel to be a sincere effort on the part of television networks to ensure that fair and well motivated advertising becomes the norm, I have one major reservation to make, commendable though these codes are. In explanation of my misgivings perhaps it might be worth while to quote from a press release of the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Basford) who has some responsibility in this matter. On October 13 he issued a statement and a press release quotes him as follows—he is referring to the code of conduct for advertisers devised by the Canadian Association of Broadcasters:

This is a voluntary code, and its usefulness will be reflected far more in how well it is observed in letter and in spirit than in its actual wording. Adherence to its principles on radio and television will eliminate many of the cases for the frequent complaints which we have received about advertising directed at children. I hope that all advertisers will make a real effort to bring their messages into line with the code just as quickly as possible. We shall be watching with great interest.

The key word here is "voluntary". Regardless of all the good intentions in the world, advertising remains and will remain one of the basic sources of revenue for commercial television. I believe difficulty will arise if networks and local station managers refuse any part of this important source of income or place restrictions on it. I think it is a little too much to expect that they will do so.

The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs has a great deal of responsibility in this area. He has many times, and justifiably so, boasted of the tremendous strides we have made in this country in the area of consumer protection. We are well ahead of the United States in many important respects. I would suggest to him that one of the ways of staying ahead would be to take the voluntary codes which have been promulgated by the CBC and CAB and have them enacted into law—incorporate them into the Broadcasting Act so that there may be no doubt as to the responsibility of broadcasters in this important area. They would know, then, exactly what their responsibilities were and would be in a better position to appreciate what was expected of them. I do not think we shall be able to take the action which is needed in respect of children's advertising if we rely upon con-