

*The Address—Mrs. G. MacInnis*

after consumer affairs, not to look after sectional interests in the community. We have the agriculture department, the fisheries department, the labour department, the industry department, and so on, and we hoped that the government would now be ready to set up a department which was consumer-oriented, the sole purpose of which would be to protect the consumers of this country and recognize them as such.

Mrs. Plumptre, the long-time president, recently retired, of the Consumers Association of Canada, made it crystal clear in her evidence that what we needed was a department in charge of consumer-oriented people who would study the needs of the consumer and the effect of various conditions upon him and her.

But, Mr. Speaker, what action do we find the government taking? We find this government sneaking a sectional interest in by the back door, presumably because it is handy for them to do so. I want to say with all the strength at my command that in my view this will nullify any effect that this department would otherwise have had. The people of this country ought to be told that the major recommendation of our committee is being summarily thrust aside, even before we have had a chance to discuss it in this parliament.

A tremendously important step is being taken here. We find that what is being set up is a department where the loyalties of the minister will be divided. We are told that a man cannot serve two masters. Yet this government deliberately sets up a department the minister of which will be asked to serve, on the one hand, the consumers, and on the other hand a particular section of the community—the investors.

I realize that there is reference made to "small" investors in one part of the speech. That is a modern version of the widows and orphans who from time immemorial have been trotted out as a screen behind which the big corporate interests and other great concerns were looked after and protected. This practice is wrong. This corporate and consumers affairs department which the government proposes to set up will be the hole in the dike through which a whole flood of special interests will be allowed to rush in, completely destroying the dike which should protect the consumers of this country. This I say as clearly and loudly as I can, because I think the consumers ought to know what the government is proposing to do.

[Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway).]

In the committee we proposed that the consumer be given protection. Protection from what, Mr. Speaker? Here I think the committee was of one mind up to a certain point, and I want to make perfectly clear where the majority opinion lay, and where the minority opinion departed from it. I want no misunderstanding about this.

All of us believed that a department of consumer affairs ought to protect the consumer from abuses in the marketplace; from unjust practices, I will put it that way. We wanted to protect the consumer from unjust practices. Our report put forward a great many excellent recommendations for doing this. We made recommendations for consumer standards having to do with labelling, packaging, weights and measures and other matters. In the second place, we made recommendations for protecting the consumer from deceptive practices of various kinds. In the third place, we made recommendations for protecting the consumer from her own lack of knowledge and her own misplaced trust in others than herself.

One recommendation, about which we were all very enthusiastic, was that it should not be left entirely to the consumer to make herself into a good, all-round shopper, though the consumers association does hope to do this. However, she does need help and information. We all felt that a department of consumer affairs should have as one of its objectives the handing out of information and the establishment of good, regular consumer information programs; not dead, dull, factual things but good, lively television shows which could hold their own with programs like "Yogi Bear", or advertisements for "whiter than white", or "the hands you love to touch", or similar advertisements which hold many people spellbound—at least according to the advertisers.

● (8:20 p.m.)

This is what we want done; this is what the whole committee agreed to do. Every one of us believes that the consumer should be protected from unjust practices in the market place. There was a minority on the committee—I wish to make it perfectly clear that it was not a large minority—which thought that more was necessary. We believe that not only should the consumer be protected against unjust practices but that he should be protected against unjustified prices—note, I said "unjustified", not "unjustifiable". This is why we feel that as part of this new department a prices and practices review board